



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Una E.
Johnson, 1971 Jan. 5

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Una E. Johnson on January 5, January 19, and July 29, 1971. The was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2023 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

Interview

[00:00:02.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think someone's saying it's January 5, 1971. Part one, Paul Cummings talking Una Johnson. Uh—well, let's see. Could we—I don't even know where you were born. Could we start with that and—

[00:00:19.23]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes, of course.

[00:00:20.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —tell me about your family and—

[00:00:22.86]

UNA JOHNSON: I was born in Iowa, in a little village.

[00:00:25.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh.

[00:00:26.77]

UNA JOHNSON: And my father and grandfather had—

[00:00:29.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which town was it?

[00:00:30.99]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it was Dayton, Iowa. You'd never know it. It's about—

[00:00:33.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Dayton?

[00:00:34.58]

UNA JOHNSON: D-A-Y-T-O-N, but it's Iowa, not Ohio. And my father and grandfather had land holdings where they fattened white-faced Hereford cattle for the Chicago market.

[00:00:56.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:00:57.47]

UNA JOHNSON: And they did that for—well, as long as I was anywhere around there. And they would have 3[00], 400 head. And they would have them pastured, at first, on—in virgin pasture that had never been turned, you know, the Midwest terrain had never been turned. So, in the spring, it was kind of beautiful, with all these little flowers and things growing up, and all kinds of wild things, you know. And here are these enormous beasts going around all—it was interesting for a child.

[00:01:29.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, yeah.

[00:01:30.17]

UNA JOHNSON: So—

[00:01:31.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have brothers, and sisters, or anything?

[00:01:33.35]

UNA JOHNSON: I have a brother who's five years younger than I. And he was in—stationed in England, in the war, and didn't—wasn't married until he came—returned from the war.

[00:01:44.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm.

[00:01:45.06]

UNA JOHNSON: And so he has—he's kind of up in years now. And he has a young family. But my father died many years ago, and mother died just last year at the age of 89.

[00:02:03.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm.

[00:02:05.07]

UNA JOHNSON: And she came from—she was—came from a German family. My father came from a Swedish family, whose parents, as young people, came to this country in that wave of, you know—

[00:02:17.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:02:18.56]

UNA JOHNSON: —just before the Civil War thing.

[00:02:21.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:02:22.86]

UNA JOHNSON: And it's a typical Midwest background. So then I went to—

[00:02:28.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, this was a very tiny town, was it not?

[00:02:31.47]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, 600 and—I don't know. I think it hasn't—the population hasn't changed. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of school, or education, or things?

[00:02:40.14]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, the school, when I was going to it, was fairly good. It was—it had some very good teachers. And I remember when I was in eighth grade. That was when I first got really interested in any kind of art, at all. I was interested because I used to paint and draw. I had a little table and things not—all kids do this.

[00:03:00.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

[00:03:01.59]

UNA JOHNSON: And then I went—we made pottery. My mother was very inventive, and got us going on a lot of things that were interesting.

[00:03:11.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:03:12.17]

UNA JOHNSON: And so we made—you know, we would do pottery, get clay from the woods, where she knew there was a place, and get flowers from where she knew there was a place.

[00:03:24.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

[00:03:24.96]

UNA JOHNSON: So all these things, she was full of all this, and a country woman. She knew all about these things. But—and it was in the eighth grade, when I was taking some medieval history or something, the teacher then brought in some University Prints. Do you remember the Paul Revere University Prints?

[00:03:42.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, right. Yeah, yeah.

[00:03:43.26]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, there were cathedrals, and all these kind of things, you know. So I got quite interested. And then I began looking around more. Then my mother had a subscription to—this was, what do you call it, an original subscription to the *Mentor* magazine, M-E-N-T-O-R.

[00:04:10.28]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:04:11.22]

UNA JOHNSON: And it was just about the size of the *Saturday Review*, except it had—it just had a cover, and then loose leaves. And, in it, were reproductions of paintings; sort of Romantic, 19th century paintings. And sometimes it would be—have architecture. It was quite an interesting—

[00:04:32.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Culture publication.

[00:04:33.14]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, it was.

[00:04:34.20]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:04:34.71]

UNA JOHNSON: And I don't know where she ever found out about it, some paper or magazine. So she was always—she was interesting. And so we had a lot of that kind of thing going on. It was kind of fun.

[00:04:47.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there an interest in music, or literature, or things like that, too?

[00:04:51.12]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, my mother's family were interested in literature and in science. My grandfather was German, was very interested in horticulture. And he also was a so-called authority on the writings and journeys of St. Paul.

[00:05:12.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, my. [Laughs.]

[00:05:13.77]

UNA JOHNSON: I mean, he just was interested in that.

[00:05:15.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:05:15.84]

UNA JOHNSON: He wasn't especially religious. He just was interested in this particular thing. So we had—and my aunts—and my mother had five or six sisters. And they are all interested in either literature or something of that sort, mostly literature. And in the little town, there were Shakespeare—there was a Shakespeare Club, which doesn't exist anymore. Ever—or anything of cultural nature, it doesn't exist there. But in these days, it did. And this was—

[00:05:47.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I wonder what happened to it.

[00:05:49.29]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, there was a people—there was a man who was editor of a terrible little paper, a little town paper, a county paper. He was interested in the writings of Shakespeare. And they read it in, you know, little groups. And it was quite an unusual kind of thing. But I think this happened in those times, when there wasn't TV, and radio, and all the other news media.

[00:06:14.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do in the winter, right? [Laughs.]

[00:06:16.95]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, well, my, the same sort of thing, except, then, we were outdoors. And it'd snow all the time. I don't know how I survived all that. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's, yeah, the most fun. I know. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:06:33.63]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was kind of—it was a naïve, pleasant childhood, really, I mean, in growing up. And I was there right through high school. And then I went to—the first year, I went to Ames, Iowa, which was a state college.

[00:06:51.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Yeah.

[00:06:52.35]

UNA JOHNSON: Because my family—it was 40 miles from home. And my family were sure I was going to be dreadfully homesick. They were so positive that they wouldn't think of not letting me go anywhere else. So I went, the first year. And I couldn't care less about Home Economics, which was the thing I could take. And that didn't interest me. So, the next year, I went to the University of Chicago, where one of my aunts was teaching.

[00:07:17.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so that's how you knew about the school.

[00:07:19.57]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:07:19.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was wondering how you picked the school.

[00:07:22.24]

UNA JOHNSON: And so—

[00:07:22.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was she teaching?

[00:07:24.22]

UNA JOHNSON: She was teaching in the—she was teaching, at that time, remedial reading. And it was a very early time, when they were beginning to do that at the university school, which was an experimental school connected with the university. But it was a whole elementary and school right up through high school, a very—I think it still exists.

[00:07:47.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, a Lab School.

[00:07:48.37]

UNA JOHNSON: It was a Lab School.

[00:07:49.33]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:07:49.75]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm.

[00:07:49.89]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. What was her name?

[00:07:51.40]

UNA JOHNSON: Louise Putzke, P-U-T-Z-K-E. And she's—I just visited her not very long ago. She's 85 and still fussing around with her income tax and all kinds of things like that—[they laugh]—but pretty bright, you know.

[00:08:09.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Oh, that's—

[00:08:12.75]

UNA JOHNSON: She says she's bored with all that now. So I don't know. We'll see. [Laughs]

[00:08:17.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you find moving from the real country to a real city?

[00:08:24.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I loved Chicago. I had a terrible time at the university, the first year, because I wasn't prepared. And I think, in all these small schools, they don't teach you how to study, how to approach a study project. And so it took me a whole year to find that out. And I was unhappy and unpleasant. It was an unpleasant time. But after I got onto that, then it was all right. And the university, then, was pretty exciting.

[00:08:53.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:08:54.88]

UNA JOHNSON: It was experimental. And they were just—the year I left, they got—the Hutchins guy in. And he stirred up a lot of things.

[00:09:05.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:09:06.10]

UNA JOHNSON: It was very exciting.

[00:09:07.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, what—did you have a sense of direction when you were physically there, or were you—

[00:09:14.53]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I took art courses like crazy, all the ones that I could.

[00:09:16.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you really did? [Cross talk.]

[00:09:17.89]

UNA JOHNSON: But my idea was—because I didn't have any other experience, I thought, well, I can teach it. And I took all those terrible education courses. You know, I had to take five or six of them. And I was very impatient. And I got a job somewhere in Wheaton, Illinois, or someplace. And I went to it. And I had the interview, and everything. And they were willing to hire me. And I couldn't take the job. I couldn't do it. I thought, no—

[00:09:52.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: A teaching job.

[00:09:52.48]

UNA JOHNSON: —I just can't do this teaching job. It's going to bore the hell out of me.

[00:09:56.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Yeah.

[00:09:58.43]

UNA JOHNSON: And so my aunt was rather disturbed, because she thought, well, here I had a chance. And there, I didn't have any job. So I got a job, just an ordinary, any kind of old job

at the John Crerar Library, which was a scientific library in Chicago run by a wonderful old Norwegian—gruff, old fellow by the name of Christian Bay. And I think his son or nephew is high up in the diplomatic services, has been. Anyway, this man was a wonderfully crusty old fellow who knew his books. And I learned a lot from him from—about books. And—but that was a summer job. And then they kept me on. You see, I was an untrained—I was untrained for library work. And they were trying to get trained—they were trying to make that a profession around—

[00:11:01.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:11:02.55]

UNA JOHNSON: This was in '28, 1928.

[00:11:05.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you were still in school, or you were out?

[00:11:07.22]

UNA JOHNSON: I was out. And I was really out, because I didn't take that teaching job. And it was not a good time, in '28 and '29. It wasn't a good time to not have a job.

[00:11:17.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:11:18.26]

UNA JOHNSON: So my aunt was a little impatient with me. She was patient, but she was kind of impatient, too. So then I had haunted the Art Institute all the years I'd been in—at the university because it was kind of an easy—we had classes that would—you know, were sort of connected. And I was always at the Art Institute. And—

[00:11:44.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, were there any professors or instructors at the university that, you know, stand out in your mind at this point?

[00:11:51.91]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, there was—yeah, there was a fellow by the name of Walter Sargent, who was head of the Art Department. And he was more interested, I guess, in architecture. But he was interested in color in architecture. And he was messing around with all kinds of colors and materials—

[00:12:11.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

[00:12:12.02]

UNA JOHNSON: —even then. And he was a very inspiring kind of guy for young students coming on.

[00:12:19.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:12:20.24]

UNA JOHNSON: And then there was a Ms. Van Pappelendam, who was at the Art Institute and did the courses there. She was a fascinating old lady. And she, I think, died just a few years ago. Very preserved. The thing that appealed to me, always, was the rank individualist, always was—no matter how difficult he might be, he was fun to me. And then there was George Downing, who's now dean of the art school at Brown University and has

been for years. I saw him, oh, some years ago. And I said, George Downing, I took your class in Renaissance paintings for years, two years.

[00:13:07.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

[00:13:08.02]

UNA JOHNSON: And he says, oh, my God, I was just a course away from—an hour away from my students at the time.

[00:13:16.85]

[They laugh.]

[00:13:18.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it happens a lot.

[00:13:19.52]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Well, he turned out to be a very good artist, and a very nice person.

[00:13:25.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:13:25.41]

UNA JOHNSON: His father had been a professor. I think it was biology, at the University of Chicago. And there were a lot of people like that, who were—whose parents were—had connections with the university earlier. And these were my contemporaries. And we were always kind of fussing around and thinking we were very avant-garde, like all kids do. [Laughs.]

[00:13:50.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, yeah, some of the—well, what was it like in the '20s in Chicago? Because that was a wild time.

[00:14:00.08]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, yeah, it was—uh—I got on—in there in the—some—from 1925. And the Art Institute was marvelous.

[00:14:12.49]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:14:15.48]

UNA JOHNSON: And they had had a lot of regional things. But there was Frank Lloyd Wright, building things, you know, and buildings all around the university and the South side. There were several Frank Lloyd Wright buildings, and Sullivan—And these were just ordinary, everyday things that—We didn't realize that Chicago was rather unique in this whole group of people—

[00:14:39.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The architecture.

[00:14:39.93]

UNA JOHNSON: —and still is, I think, you know. Because we were just right in it. And then

there was that Harriet Monroe, who edited *Poetry* magazine. Remember?

[00:14:53.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Right, right.

[00:14:54.24]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, oh, she was an old gal then. And—

[00:14:58.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know her, or—

[00:14:59.43]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, I knew her. The man who was—Who was the man who just retired from the Worcester? I can't remember his name.

[00:15:14.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Daniel Rich.

[00:15:15.71]

UNA JOHNSON: Daniel. Dan Rich. Well, he was president of the Poetry Society when I was there. And she was still involved, very much, in that. This was the University of Chicago Poetry Society. And Dan was a young fellow. He wasn't even at the Art Institute yet. And very handsome, and very busy. [They laugh.]

[00:15:40.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. His wife was a poet, wasn't she? Didn't she write poetry?

[00:15:45.26]

UNA JOHNSON: I think so.

[00:15:45.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think so, yeah.

[00:15:46.72]

UNA JOHNSON: I think—

[00:15:49.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: He mentioned something about that.

[00:15:50.27]

UNA JOHNSON: Didn't she come from a—I'd forgotten. Didn't she come from a rather well-known Chicago family?

[00:15:55.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't remember.

[00:15:56.65]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't remember that.

[00:15:57.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well.

[00:16:00.14]

UNA JOHNSON: But—

[00:16:01.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you get involved with the life of the city? Or did the university require so much time and energy?

[00:16:10.45]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it required pretty much time and energy. I did do some volunteer work at the Chicago Settlement House. And, to me, that was a revelation, kind of a fierce one, with these little kids behind the Irish stockyards. And I got on rather well with them. I don't know why, because I knew nothing about what you should do about this. And I had no experience. And I was not enrolled in any kind of sociology or anything. But how I got involved with that, I don't seem to remember. But my friends were interested.

[00:16:49.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:51.35]

UNA JOHNSON: And we were—we did volunteer work, and not necessarily had—it had very little to do with art. It was just a general thing. And they were really deprived little kids.

[00:17:04.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:17:05.30]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was another window out, which was kind of revealing and rather upsetting at first, until I got used to the idea that there were people like that. [Laughs.] You can be awfully sheltered in a little village in the Midwest.

[00:17:21.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ah, that's true. That's really true. Were there students who had become friends of yours, who you kept up with for years and years, or didn't that happen?

[00:17:30.33]

UNA JOHNSON: You know, not too many of them. There was Polly Ames. And I've lost track of her now. And then there was Charlotte Milles. And these were people whose fathers were professors. And then, of course, there was there was Dan Rich, and George Downing, and Rachael Fort, and Allen Weller. Allen is at the University of Illinois, I believe. He's head of the department.

[00:17:57.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:18:02.18]

UNA JOHNSON: And, well, there were some kind of wonderful eccentrics, but they—I haven't kept up with any of those people. I guess I'm not one to do that very much. I'm not a joiner, in the first place, not—if they're in the things I'm doing, then that's great.

[00:18:19.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you see them, you see them. Yeah.

[00:18:21.43]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:18:21.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Okay.

[00:18:23.93]

UNA JOHNSON: But—

[00:18:26.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you get to Western Reserve [University] in Chicago?

[00:18:31.22]

[00:18:32.96]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh. [Laughs.]

Well, I finally—I pounded the pavement for a good six months after I refused to do the teaching job, because my idea was to get into the museum field, belatedly.

[00:18:47.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm. Oh, really?

[00:18:48.41]

UNA JOHNSON: And there was no way of doing that. I mean, there was no formal way of doing that. So I wrote letters and letters and letters and letters. And the people at the Art Institute were encouraging and helpful and told me where to write, and do all those kind of things. And I got responses from, oh, a few people, including a person at the Cleveland Museum.

[00:19:16.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:19:17.46]

UNA JOHNSON: And eventually, I went to the Cleveland Museum as a—as sort of a person who did research in the library for the staff, and worked in the library, then, that we had—Western Reserve University people coming in there. And they have one of the really fine art libraries in the museum field, not considering the great enormous museum. I think it's one of the best. It's the most professional, I should think. So I was there about seven or eight years, and meanwhile, I was getting my master's degree at Western Reserve University. That was kind of hilarious because in that time—it was '35 and '36—they didn't have a real strong art department. They hardly had enough courses for you to take to—

[00:20:12.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Get a degree.

[00:20:13.08]

UNA JOHNSON: —get a degree. So there I was taking work in sociology that had to do with literature and historical things, and they gave me credit for that in the art field. [Paul laughs.] So I wrote a paper on—and it was very ambitious. And I look at it now, and it seems hilarious to me. But it was the beginning of the human figure in art, you know, the stick figures—

[00:20:47.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

[00:20:47.43]

UNA JOHNSON: —kind of stick figures in Primitive art, and Prehistoric. Well, I found when I got into it, that Primitive and Prehistoric and all that was quite a different story. But I got an awful lot of material together, and the man who was in charge of the courses was very good, and very helpful and was very encouraging, which was nice. But I learned an awful lot just by

you know, delving into things even though I wasn't equipped to come to any decent conclusions about what what I was writing [laughs].

[00:21:21.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what got you interested in museum work? You were interested in art, and you didn't want to teach. Was the museum the alternative?

[00:21:28.65]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I knew people at the Art Institute, and I thought that was pretty great.

[00:21:33.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:21:33.95]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think that was how it happened. And I had a difficult time finding anybody who was—and they had no courses in museum work, you know, nothing of that sort, and many of the people who were in it were there because they had enough of a of a private income so they could afford to do this kind of work. Especially the jobs weren't that—

[00:22:03.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —paid very little.

[00:22:04.38]

UNA JOHNSON: —paid very little. And I'm thinking I must have started at Cleveland Museum for about \$125, \$[1]30 a month. [Laughs.]

[00:22:14.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, the Museum of Modern Art was paying people \$25 a week when they started.

[00:22:19.32]

UNA JOHNSON: Sure. [Laughs.] But I was at Cleveland about seven or eight years, and Harry Francis was such a sweet man. He was a curator of paintings and retired recently. He was one of the Fogg Museum people.

[00:22:38.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Paul Sachs's museum, yeah.

[00:22:39.93]

UNA JOHNSON: And he was very encouraging and did everything he could to get me out into the museum field where—because he thought there that they were—the staff was pretty static. I mean, you had heads of departments, and they were a fairly young group of people.

[00:22:57.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:22:57.81]

UNA JOHNSON: And there was not much chance of going—of getting along. And so eventually, then I picked up my master's degree after a fashion, and came to Brooklyn for an interview at the Brooklyn Museum.

[00:23:19.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is through your letter writing campaign.

[00:23:22.32]

UNA JOHNSON: No, this was later, because it was the—the letter writing went on before I went to the Cleveland Museum.

[00:23:29.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Right, right.

[00:23:29.37]

UNA JOHNSON: After I got to the Cleveland Museum, then it was an easier transition.

[00:23:32.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did the College Art Association exist in those days?

[00:23:35.58]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, but I didn't know about them, and they were awfully stuffy about—they were interested more in academic subjects entirely, really.

[00:23:50.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:23:50.49]

UNA JOHNSON: And they weren't that active, I think.

[00:23:54.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:23:54.45]

UNA JOHNSON: I think they weren't organized. especially.

[00:23:58.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —to where they are now.

[00:24:00.15]

UNA JOHNSON: No.

[00:24:05.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, anyway, how did you get to Brooklyn?

[00:24:13.83]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Cec [ph] Seiberling, who was then married to one of the Seiberling brothers, was working at the Cleveland—at the Brooklyn Museum. She came through one day looking for an assistant in the Print Department for Carl Schniewind, and Harry Francis brought her in to see me. And so then I went there for an interview and did get the job.

[00:24:43.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have an interest in prints or drawings and that time, in particular?

[00:24:45.90]

UNA JOHNSON: No, I never had a course in it at all. [Laughs.]

[00:24:50.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's the way to start, easy. [They laugh.]

[00:24:54.33]

UNA JOHNSON: Now, I mean, you can get master's, doctor's degrees on—who have made some big thing about prints, you know. I didn't know—I knew one print from another, but that was just about all. I mean, I had [never -Ed.] been doing history of painting and sculpture, even architecture. And I got interested while I was at the Cleveland Museum because they had a good, strong department. I got interested in Oriental art and especially Chinese, but I wasn't equipped in any way whatsoever to do anything of that sort. And somehow that wasn't for me. I loved it. I had a great time. I was at the art school, and busy with pottery. I even got credit for that, which was very amazing. [They laugh.]

[00:25:46.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everything worked, though, didn't it?

[00:25:47.50]

UNA JOHNSON: And everything seemed to work. [Laughs.]

[00:25:48.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. Well, anyway, so you came to Brooklyn for an interview, right?

[00:25:57.43]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, I came and—you know, Schniewind wasn't the easiest person in the world.

[00:26:02.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I want to talk about him.

[00:26:05.51]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] He was a—but he needed somebody, and he was reorganizing the whole library and Print Department at Brooklyn. And he had a fairly clear field to do it in, and Philip Youtz was there at the time.

[00:26:27.01]

PAUL CUMMIINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:26:27.28]

UNA JOHNSON: And that was the time when they were having the WPA people remodel the whole building, and Phil Youtz was a great person for that because he had architectural training—

[00:26:37.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:26:39.46]

UNA JOHNSON: —and was really—he, too, was rather a difficult man. But he certainly knew what he was about, and he did have a sense of what he thought was the organizational possibilities of that building, which was helpful. There are things now that need changes, but it worked for a long while. And they did get a whole thing, the whole building remodeled on WPA materials, and the people.

[00:27:15.25]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Helped with it, yeah.

[00:27:16.87]

UNA JOHNSON: It's astonishing. [Laughs.]

[00:27:19.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fascinating. Well, here you were coming to New York. You really hit the big cities quickly.

[00:27:25.78]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, I really did. I came to New York in the summer. It was hot as hell, and I thought, you know, I don't believe I'm liking this, because I had a car out in Cleveland, and I could buzz around in Gates Mills and do all kinds of nice things in the woods, the country, you know. And here it really took some doing to get out once you got in, and certainly I wasn't up to having a car. So the first year wasn't very—it was again difficult.

[00:28:02.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you live in Manhattan or Brooklyn?

[00:28:04.48]

UNA JOHNSON: No, I lived always in Manhattan. I lived up in the 60s somewhere, East 60s. At first I was staying with friends, and then I got a small furnished flat, sort of like a sublet.

[00:28:17.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:28:19.91]

UNA JOHNSON: And then I came down into the Village and shared quarters with a girl from Rochester who did jewelry or something. And that worked for a little while. Then I got my own apartment. But during those days, you could move every year in New York, and you did.

[00:28:44.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:28:44.48]

UNA JOHNSON: I moved around New York every year. Instead of having a paint job, I just moved, you know? [They laugh.] Everybody did. And if you didn't have too many chattels, it wasn't that expensive. [Laughs.]

[00:28:57.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It was easy, yeah. Oh, how horrible. Well, it's interesting that you lived always in Manhattan and commuted to Brooklyn.

[00:29:05.06]

UNA JOHNSON: I never was persuaded that Brooklyn was the place for me to live. They certainly tried, and they threatened me on occasion with the fact that, you know, this is a borough of Brooklyn job, and maybe I should live there. But somehow I always managed not to. I said always that I would prefer to commute in the daytime rather than at night, because all my friends were here. All my interests were right over here. I mean, then there was nothing in Brooklyn except nice houses and nice people. But I didn't know very many of them, and where I did know more people here. And I never regretted that.

[00:29:49.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what was it like now? Because this was moving into another largish museum.

[00:29:57.44]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, well, that was kind of exciting because there were a lot of young people. There were Sheldon and Caroline Keck, and there was John Bauer. And there was John Cooney, who is now in Cleveland, and he was then Registrar. He had nothing to do with Egyptian collection at that time. And then Phil Youtz was the Director. And Carl Schniewind—this was—he had just returned from Switzerland, where he'd been in a sanitarium for, I think,

quite a number of years.

[00:30:36.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he was a collector or something, wasn't he?

[00:30:38.76]

UNA JOHNSON: He collected Daumier. He had all but a few Daumier prints. Of the 5,000-odd Daumier prints there that exist, he had all but just a few, three or four or something like that.

[00:30:49.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

[00:30:52.17]

UNA JOHNSON: And his mother was from Pennsylvania, and had—I think his family had coal interests or something there, so they were rather well-to-do. He had a brother who was an architect, a modern architect. Elmer, I believe his name was. And there were always—there were terrific family rivalries and problems.

[00:31:20.33]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. So my understanding was that he'd sold part of his collection and lost an enormous amount of money because of the Depression, or something.

[00:31:26.98]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, he sold his collection, I think, in Paris—but I'm not sure. Maybe it was Switzerland—and I don't think got that much out of it. On the other hand, he bought at a time when it certainly wasn't expensive to buy Daumier prints. He did have other prints.

[00:31:50.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:31:50.98]

UNA JOHNSON: He had a special feeling for the French 19th century, I think, and quite a good eye. He was terribly erratic, because he wasn't—his health was really quite bad—often terribly erratic and sometimes absolutely ruthless in his dealings.

[00:32:21.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:32:22.61]

UNA JOHNSON: Strange man, very strange man. I learned an awful lot from him.

[00:32:28.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what was it like to work with him on—

[00:32:29.99]

UNA JOHNSON: It was hell.

[00:32:32.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know. Yeah.

[00:32:33.05]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think that would be borne out by the people at the Art Institute, where he worked for many years. But he was a brilliant person.

[00:32:46.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the difficulty? The erratic quality or—

[00:32:49.91]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, and he was apt to play one person against another just to see what would happen—in a very—it got to be—on occasion got to be quite vicious. He quarreled with everybody on the staff. He practically had no friends there, finally, and he had a great way with old ladies who had money.

[00:33:23.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:33:23.75]

UNA JOHNSON: And he did quite well on getting things in to the collection, and certainly he started with a very spotty collection.

[00:33:38.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How old was the collection at that point?

[00:33:42.17]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh my. It was—

[00:33:44.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had they been collecting from the earlier days?

[00:33:46.58]

UNA JOHNSON: A long time.

[00:33:47.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it was, yeah.

[00:33:51.47]

UNA JOHNSON: Uh—Ms. Hutchinson was the Librarian, and also the print person, and she was a contemporary of Pop Hart and all those people. And the American Society of Graphic Artists was first the Society of Brooklyn Artists, and it was formed out of the Brooklyn Museum—

[00:34:16.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right. I remember that, yeah.

[00:34:18.95]

UNA JOHNSON: —at the library, under Ms. Hutchinson's aegis.

[00:34:24.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So was there—

[00:34:25.38]

UNA JOHNSON: There was a—

[00:34:25.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —a collection, or a history of—

[00:34:26.39]

UNA JOHNSON: It was quite a collection there, and a history of really serious—it just happened that the things that were collected weren't the things that Schniewind was at all interested in. He wasn't at all interested in American art, and the major part of it was American art. Uh—not the major part, but a good bit of it—so that there were a lot of things that were kind of tossed out, which I guess I spent some time and money getting back in other—

[00:35:01.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ways and means.

[00:35:02.11]

UNA JOHNSON: —ways, just to fill in the American section.

[00:35:06.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of special projects did you work on with him at that time, or what did you—

[00:35:13.07]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, he was interested in Gauguin and Matisse and Rouault. He always was. And he was doing definitive catalogs of those, which never got done. He was also—he also had a Bresdin catalog, and the Bresdin catalog, I understand, was going to come out. But I believe Harold Joachim thought that so much work still had to be done on it, and I don't know whether he has had time to do anything, or what has happened. Anyway, there was some litigation against Schniewind's doing the catalog on Matisse and Rouault.

[00:35:51.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:35:51.98]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And—

[00:35:54.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that because they didn't want it or somebody else was doing it?

[00:35:57.79]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I believe somebody in the Matisse family was going to do it, or they didn't want—they didn't want this to happen. And so he merely sat on them, you know. [Coughs.] And he did have a funny thing, though. He had done under some kind of rant [ph.] while he was in Switzerland, a bibliography on prints, and it was files and files of it that he had. But he never could quite get it set. He never could quite release anything for publication. It was a terrible trauma for him to do.

[00:36:44.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I've never seen very long pieces from—

[00:36:47.28]

UNA JOHNSON: No, he didn't do anything.

[00:36:48.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everything was very short.

[00:36:50.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I have a feeling that it was difficult for him to sustain enough—his interest, and his scholarship was that of a private collector. And I think that also his health—he just wasn't able to maintain a clear picture of a big project long enough to get it out, because he was going back to it, and he would go back to it, and then he'd be ill, and

he'd go back to it.

[00:37:27.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So it was always—

[00:37:29.29]

UNA JOHNSON: And it was always like that.

[00:37:30.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —stop and start.

[00:37:31.06]

UNA JOHNSON: It was always that way. And he just couldn't ever bear to release the stuff.

[00:37:37.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

[00:37:40.69]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it's a problem sometimes.

[00:37:41.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: A lot. I know.

[00:37:42.85]

UNA JOHNSON: He's not unique in this.

[00:37:43.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Authors that you have to pull a page out of.

[00:37:48.16]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Yes. But he was very good for the Brooklyn Museum when he came, for the—He had a certain definite idea of scholarship. His visual sense was absolutely excellent, and this was needed. And at that time when they were remodeling and redoing the whole Brooklyn collection, he was very helpful, and he had a real sense about what should be known about pieces, and how they should be handled, all this.

[00:38:20.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? So that—yeah. Interesting.

[00:38:23.32]

UNA JOHNSON: Which then was a new kind of thing here in this country, you know. I mean, they didn't even have restoration departments, or anything like that in the museums. Sheldon's [Keck -Ed.] was the first one of any that really got down to the serious things, aside from the Metropolitan having their own people working around, because it was a very big organization. And I'm sure the Boston Museum, also.

[00:38:51.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's interesting when you think how new all these things are.

[00:38:57.73]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, really. I think the American museums have made tremendous strides in just the time they've been rather functioning other than like a little historical society or something like that. They're not far removed from that, where they had board of trustees

that were greatly excited, but hadn't the foggiest notion of what to do about the actual maintaining and—

[00:39:25.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And archiving.

[00:39:27.01]

UNA JOHNSON: —cataloging of a collection.

[00:39:28.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And no professional staff in so many of them.

[00:39:31.39]

UNA JOHNSON: And no professional staff. They just didn't have it. It's quite interesting.

[00:39:36.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, at some early point you got a Carnegie Fellowship.

[00:39:41.76]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, that was just for a—that was a summer fellowship I got through—when I was first at the Brooklyn Museum. And it was traveling. I'd never been to Europe before. This was 1939, I think, just before the war. I got back just a month before the war burst out.

[00:40:00.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, wow. Well, what did you do in Europe? And where did you go?

[00:40:02.68]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, I went everywhere. I went to Paris; I went to London; I went to Italy, and I went to—I guess it was Switzerland too. But it was just really—I was doing—I was fussing around with drawings at the time, and I hadn't seen any of the big drawing collections. And I was going to the Albertina, but I didn't get there because of the—well, it was late. Problems got—late, it got kind of difficult.

[00:40:40.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you knew there was something happening.

[00:40:42.33]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was funny. I think that was the year that Vollard died, and it was in 1944 that I did the Vollard—

[00:40:57.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Book.

[00:40:57.62]

UNA JOHNSON: —book. I never knew him.

[00:41:01.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Did you have languages? Did you speak German—

[00:41:08.87]

UNA JOHNSON: No, I didn't.

[00:41:09.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —or anything at home?

[00:41:10.10]

UNA JOHNSON: I could read some German, and I understood some German. And I could read French, but I couldn't—I didn't speak it, and I still don't. I think Midwesterners are terrible about languages. They can go anywhere in the world and—I mean anywhere in the United States, and they don't have to bother with a different language. And again, it's only been within the last—well, really since the war, the Second World War, that we've taken a more serious view of languages in schools. I think that's one of the great things that if anybody's going into the museum field, they just jolly well better have languages. Otherwise, it's very difficult. And I think most people now do. I don't think there's any problem.

[00:42:02.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. All the big schools have it.

[00:42:04.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:42:08.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.] What kind of things were you involved with? Because you start there in '37. You went to Europe in '39. Um—

[00:42:19.98]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I was doing—see, I was just an assistant in the Print Department at the Brooklyn Museum, so I was doing—I was doing the cataloging of the collection, which had not been done, and then I was helping on Carl's ideas for exhibitions, and he had many of them. And then he was buying whenever he could. He had a really small budget. And, uh—

[00:42:52.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many gifts to the museum at that time?

[00:42:55.13]

UNA JOHNSON: No. All the gifts, the big gifts, had already come, and the problem was that the investments that were made on the bequests, when they were in very large amounts, just kind of petered out. They weren't carefully reinvested.

[00:43:18.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. What about people, though, giving pictures and prints? Were they more interested in giving a painting than some prints, I suppose?

[00:43:26.12]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, we got quite a few prints over the years, but they were many that you didn't—I mean, that weren't that great.

[00:43:36.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:43:37.70]

UNA JOHNSON: And long before I came they had refused the Bliss collection. And there were a lot of other things that were very queer. You wondered how they came to such conclusions, you know, the Board of Governors. But the elder Mr. Blum, Mr. Edward Blum, and Mrs. Charles Pratt—no, was it Charles Pratt? I guess it was Charles Pratt.

[00:44:08.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I think she was.

[00:44:10.10]

UNA JOHNSON: They were really great old-timers, and they weren't very interested in the modern stuff. But if they thought you wanted it, and you gave them reasonable reasons, they would back you up, which was very nice. And they were active. They were of that generation that were really—you know, well, they founded the museum, for heaven's sakes. [They laugh.]

[00:44:36.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You did something, you really did it, yeah.

[00:44:39.89]

UNA JOHNSON: And it wasn't a going thing. It was going—and they used to buy things. They'd go to Europe and buy things, and send them back to the museum, and some of them were horrendous.

[00:44:49.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yeah, well that's—

[00:44:50.94]

UNA JOHNSON: But it's the old story.

[00:44:52.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Trustee's delight [laughs]. Well, Schniewind went off to Chicago at some point, didn't he?

[00:44:59.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, about 19—I think it was 1941. So he wasn't at Brooklyn awfully long. I think he came in '36—

[00:45:11.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, just about a year before you, then.

[00:45:13.53]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And left in '41. I think it was '41, yes.

[00:45:19.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, because '42 you became Curator.

[00:45:21.27]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And then he was at the Art Institute all the rest of that time, and built a great collection of drawings.

[00:45:36.16]

PAUL CUMMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:45:36.43]

UNA JOHNSON: But they had it to start with, and they also had a lot of money.

[00:45:41.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Endless amounts of money, it seems.

[00:45:43.45]

UNA JOHNSON: He again—he got hold of some of those older ladies who just gave him everything he wanted, practically. But Joachim has done that too. I mean, Joachim was even better.

[00:45:53.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how was it that he could work with those women, but yet he really couldn't work with the people on the staff at the museum?

[00:46:02.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it was an entirely different problem. I had a feeling that he could do it because he understood his mother quite well, and she was an elderly, elegant old gal, quite smart, quite good. And he got along with her, then he didn't get along with her. It was just a—it was a whole personality problem. [Paul laughs.] It wasn't just the staff. It was his family.

[00:46:34.35]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:46:36.02]

UNA JOHNSON: And he was married to a Swiss lady who had been a very great Swiss athlete, I think. And so she found it confining to—he didn't like the sportive thing, which he always said, "sportive thing." And I think she found that difficult, and I think she also had kind of a difficult time about him, and smoothing over some of the problems that always were there originally, trying to be a diplomatic kind of go-between that would keep life smoothly. [Laughs.]

[00:47:17.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Didn't they have a daughter, or something?

[00:47:19.16]

UNA JOHNSON: No.

[00:47:19.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No? No children?

[00:47:20.87]

UNA JOHNSON: No children.

[00:47:22.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I thought they did.

[00:47:23.76]

UNA JOHNSON: And I don't know if—I don't know whether Mrs. Schniewind is living now or not. She, I believe, had some kind of art shop in Chicago for a while with a friend of hers.

[00:47:36.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:47:38.30]

UNA JOHNSON: She was a terribly nice woman, and terribly patient, and a very sensitive person. I think that Carl wouldn't have been able to do as much as he did if it hadn't been that she was silently sort of in the background and on an even keel. [Laughs.]

[00:48:03.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I often wonder why there are so many really difficult and/or eccentric people who are in the museum world. Certainly a number of them are—

[00:48:12.41]

UNA JOHNSON: There are a lot of—

[00:48:13.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —unbelievable. [Laughs.]

[00:48:15.11]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, there are. I don't know. It seemed to attract a person who's kind of a rank individualist in his tastes, or his approach to living. I don't know. I think the only one that goes in one better is the artist, [they laugh] and I think he's all right. I like his eccentricities, and I think he's a—I think it's one of the great things we've got left, you know? [Laughs.]

[00:48:50.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The last of the individualists.

[00:48:52.43]

UNA JOHNSON: The last of the great individualists [laughs].

[00:48:54.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what was it like becoming a curator there? Did this change your activities a great deal? Or did you do more?

[00:49:01.82]

UNA JOHNSON: No, it really didn't. I did more. I did a lot more exhibitions. And I did a lot more in the American field, too than I did before—first of all, because it needed to be done, and second, we did have funds to go on in the American field.

[00:49:23.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:49:24.20]

UNA JOHNSON: So there are certain circumstances which sort of plot your activities.

[00:49:35.70]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you come to write the Vollard book?

[00:49:39.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I got very interested—of course, Schniewind was buying all those—the Bonnard portfolios and the Vuillard portfolios, and I was reading all this stuff about them. And I came upon a list of—just a tentative list of the publications of Ambroise Vollard. And I don't know. I got so enchanted with it. It was just like a game to me, and I had great fun.

[00:50:04.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:50:04.61]

UNA JOHNSON: And so it was 1944 when that book came out, an edition of 300. I must have got about a quarter of a cent an hour for that book [laughs].

[00:50:15.33]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it's a nice book. Every once in a while you see it, really.

[00:50:19.49]

UNA JOHNSON: I was in Paris, and there in the window it was and for \$87.

[00:50:24.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow.

[00:50:25.34]

UNA JOHNSON: And I felt like going in and saying, "What would it cost if I signed it for you, autographed it?" [They laugh.]

[00:50:32.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow. That's marvelous, lovely.

[00:50:34.77]

UNA JOHNSON: But I'm going to revise that soon as I can.

[00:50:36.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah?

[00:50:37.21]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:50:37.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Well, that was published by—

[00:50:39.37]

UNA JOHNSON: —Wittenborn.

[00:50:39.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —Wittenborn.

[00:50:40.05]

UNA JOHNSON: It was his first book here.

[00:50:42.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? How did you ever get involved with him? And how—

[00:50:45.21]

UNA JOHNSON: He came out to the museum with a little satchel. He was German, and he knew Schniewind. And they conversed great lengths in German. And with Wittenborn was his partner then, Heinz Schultz, who had a beautiful eye. He really had a beautiful eye, and did finally go into the art dealer field. And he had quite a wonderful reputation in the various museums throughout the country—through, first, his books, and then his own—His death was a tragic one because he was a very sound person. George was more interested in the books as such.

[00:51:39.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He's a real book seller.

[00:51:40.53]

UNA JOHNSON: He's a real book seller and a marvelous one. He loves every minute of it.

[00:51:43.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know. He's fantastic.

[00:51:46.59]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] But George got interested in it, and then we—I was as naïve as could be about writing a book. [Paul laughs.] I mean, you know I hadn't considered writing

books. And I had done a lot of research, and I had a lot done. I'd never written much before, and so this was all a whole new and brand-new thing. And we had a terrible time with the book itself. And George, thank goodness, had a good sense about lining up a good catalog. And I had all the material, and I was organized, too because I had been very well-trained by Schniewind, and also by the people at Cleveland in organizing a subject.

[00:52:46.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:52:47.11]

UNA JOHNSON: So when I found this an absolutely enchanting kind of pursuit, it became—it just became the whole thing for years, several years there.

[00:53:01.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:53:03.37]

UNA JOHNSON: And I guess I started—I still fuss around with it. I have a list of stuff that should be added to it. Yeah, I'll do it one time [laughs].

[00:53:12.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was fun having a book come out.

[00:53:14.38]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. It came out—when was it? George brought it out at an opening, some print show. I don't even remember the print show. The first time I ever saw it, I was just absolutely flabbergasted. [They laugh.]

[00:53:35.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, why was the edition only 300? Was there a reason—

[00:53:40.49]

UNA JOHNSON: George decided—and I agreed with him—that we couldn't sell anymore, because he figured—well, there were so many museums, and so many universities who had maybe art departments or art galleries connected with them, and that was about it. So he put it out on very fancy handmade paper, and did it up well, and it came out at, I think, \$18, \$20, you know. And he had Peter—oh, Peter, who did the—what's his last name, who did the Peter Pauper Press things? Peter—what was his last name? Do you remember?

[00:54:24.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Yeah, I know who you mean. I can't think of it now.

[00:54:27.59]

UNA JOHNSON: He did the book. He did the printing, and a nice job it was. And now it needs to be redone and—what we should have done, of course, was, as the Europeans do, to make a deluxe edition, and then to make a paperback edition.

[00:54:47.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, the two.

[00:54:48.98]

UNA JOHNSON: But George didn't see that that would be possible to sell it in this country, and he hadn't thought of—

[00:54:57.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Being brought, yeah.

[00:54:58.01]

UNA JOHNSON: —his books going to Europe. He'd thought of it, but he didn't—he had no—he hadn't enough contacts then, because he was—he then didn't have a bookshop. He just had books in a satchel.

[00:55:12.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. He lived on a farm or something.

[00:55:13.94]

UNA JOHNSON: And he—yeah, he lived on a farm, which Jean Lipman bought, which was a great farm. It was a great house. But he then had a little shop. He and Heinz had a little shop over on 57th—East 57th Street, I think, somewhere.

[00:55:35.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were on East 57th at one point, yeah.

[00:55:38.72]

UNA JOHNSON: And then George—then I think when the partnership was dissolved, George moved then up to Madison Avenue, and Heinz—he just worked from his house in Great Neck.

[00:55:58.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:55:59.57]

UNA JOHNSON: And his widow still lives in Great Neck, not in the same house. Now she's gone on to—she was a very well-to-do German Jew—Jewish family that had great holdings, and they still have some kind of a—some sort of a mouthwash or something, that they made quite a lot of money. And it's, I believe, manufactured somewhere in New Jersey now. And her mother recently died and, I think, left all the holdings to her, so she's been interested in German prints and paintings and sculptures.

[00:56:53.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's her name?

[00:56:54.95]

UNA JOHNSON: Her name is Margareta Schultz.

[00:56:56.64]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. She has an office at Borgenicht.

[00:56:58.33]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, she's with Borgenicht. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:57:03.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting that Wittenborn and Schultz are still in the same building.

[00:57:06.65]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, still the same building [laughs].

[00:57:10.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Strange.

[00:57:11.63]

UNA JOHNSON: Strange.

[00:57:14.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the reason for the "American Printmaking," the survey show in 1947?

[00:57:21.85]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, that was soon after the war, and it was during Charles Nagel's regime as Director of the Brooklyn Museum, and I got interested in—there were so many artists coming out with portfolios of prints, and I began to know a lot of artists, you know. And I was very interested in what they were doing and the new things they were doing, and they were beginning to make these enormous prints.

[00:57:49.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm. What size is enormous?

[00:57:50.63]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, the size—well, [Louis] Schanker was making them the size of this table already. Maybe not as deep, but they were a big size for—

[00:57:59.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Three, four—three by four feet.

[00:58:01.40]

UNA JOHNSON: And there were a number of national shows, including the Library of Congress show, but they were very fussy, because their equipment was such that they weren't going to show big prints. They couldn't show big prints in the equipment. And no one there at that time—and that regime is gone—was willing to—

[00:58:26.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —change.

[00:58:27.06]

UNA JOHNSON: —make the effort, you see. They were really a book thing, there again. So they had these little showcases where you could show prints this size, and so forever and ever—and the artists were getting—and I thought, the artist even isn't seeing what his colleagues are doing, and we're not seeing it anywhere.

[00:58:46.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:58:47.19]

UNA JOHNSON: So I talked to our exhibitions committee, and they thought it was a great idea. And I thought that it wouldn't be expensive to start out with, and so we started. And I sent out a flyer, and my God [Paul laughs], the things that came in, no help, no anything. I was calling on my friends from Connecticut, from everywhere to come in, please, and volunteer to unpack the stuff.

[00:59:21.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You got lots of prints.

[00:59:22.83]

UNA JOHNSON: We got lots of prints, and many of them of quite size already. They weren't as big then as they came to be, as big as a door or even bigger, but it was a very strange conglomeration of prints, too. It was the old-time stuff, the WPA stuff, and it was the little pristine wooden engravings and things. And it was Gropper still doing those fierce kind of

caricature kind of things, and it was—and then all these young artists. There was Schanker doing the new woodcuts, you know—they were new then—and Will Barnet. And Albers sent in a print, and I think we purchased that. We had purchasing wars. And I believe that was the first print—his first work came into a museum in the United States.

[01:00:26.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic. Yeah.

[01:00:28.29]

UNA JOHNSON: He told me that. I didn't know that. And we had something like 250 pieces, but my golly, I don't remember how many came in. And then it was every year. It nearly drove you out of your mind.

[01:00:43.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So by the time you finished one you were getting ready for the next one.

[01:00:45.99]

UNA JOHNSON: You were ready the next one. You were doing the next one. And finally, we got it into a biennial, and that was helpful. And then it got still so cumbersome, and less and less people in the maintenance department that could unwrap the material or even put it together again to send it out. Then we turned it into—not a competitive thing at all. It became and still is a selective thing, but it's selected out of the whole two-year period then.

[01:01:24.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, in 1947, there were very few dealers handling prints.

[01:01:29.31]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, no. You couldn't get them, and no one knew what a print was. I kept, you know, explaining to everybody who came into the museum what a print was. You couldn't even tell them. They got it all confused with photographs. They got it all confused with—

[01:01:44.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —reproductions.

[01:01:45.60]

UNA JOHNSON: —reproductions.

[01:01:46.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, the word "print"—

[01:01:47.55]

UNA JOHNSON: And it took years, and years, and years. And this wasn't just Brooklyn. It was—every museum in the country that had a print department had this same problem. You couldn't get people interested. And I tried to start a little print club. There had been a print club in the early days in Brooklyn.

[01:02:06.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[01:02:07.43]

UNA JOHNSON: And that—it had been quite active under Hutchinson. And I sent out a few flyers. I got not a soul from our whole membership. And so I just said, let's give it up because it isn't—the time isn't right for it. And I don't know as that is of importance anymore. This whole pattern has changed.

[01:02:30.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah, but there are now again print clubs starting in museums all around the country.

[01:02:34.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, this hasn't—now there's again a fascination and a great interest, and people know what they're looking at, more or less.

[01:02:41.64]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, boy. And they work at it.

[01:02:43.25]

UNA JOHNSON: And they work at it. There are a bunch of sharpies [laughs], which are nice, just wonderful.

[01:02:49.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I got a note from the Los Angeles County, and they've got over 500 members in their print club now.

[01:02:55.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, that's tremendous.

[01:02:55.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which is a lot, and it's three years old [laughs].

[01:03:00.08]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, the Cleveland Museum is one of the oldest—

[01:03:03.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, well, they limit their members.

[01:03:04.63]

UNA JOHNSON: They limit their membership.

[01:03:05.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, because they do a print every year, and they don't want an edition over—

[01:03:08.67]

UNA JOHNSON: I think they have—

[01:03:09.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —250, I think.

[01:03:09.45]

UNA JOHNSON: They can't have more than, yeah, 250.

[01:03:13.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:03:13.44]

UNA JOHNSON: But they've been an active club, and they have always contributed to the museum collection, which is nice.

[01:03:20.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, fantastic. Have you seen the book for the 50-year—

[01:03:24.15]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[01:03:24.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Beautiful.

[01:03:25.44]

UNA JOHNSON: It's beautiful. It's a beautiful thing.

[01:03:27.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Marvelous gift. Well, the first show was—it was all Americans. You had no Europeans in those early shows.

[01:03:39.33]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, this show has always been Americans. Again, it was because our funds were more effective in American than they were in European. We had very few general funds that were free. They were all earmarked for certain things, mostly American, whatever it was. And a lot of it was in the Decorative Arts, and still is, and a number of the funds were for paintings only. And so the prints just got picked up whenever there was a little extra money. I think this is true probably often in some of the smaller-funded—in museums.

[01:04:22.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, you did the survey exhibition, "1913-1947, American Printmaking."

[01:04:30.79]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, I did that with the "American Graphic" and Jean Charlot.

[01:04:38.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[01:04:39.46]

UNA JOHNSON: Jean Charlot wrote the—

[01:04:41.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I looked for a catalog, and I couldn't find one. Was there a catalog?

[01:04:44.95]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, there was.

[01:04:45.70]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was?

[01:04:46.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. I have one copy. I wonder if the Graphic Art Society—what was that called?

[01:04:58.90]

PAUL CUMMINGS: American Institute of Graphic Arts.

[01:05:00.29]

UNA JOHNSON: American Institute of Graphic Arts. I wonder if they—yeah, I think they must have a copy of it.

[01:05:03.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they may, yeah.

[01:05:08.71]

UNA JOHNSON: Charlot wrote a very good, and his typical kind of crackling introduction to that. And out in Honolulu, just last week there he was. He came out to my lecture there. I was so touched, looking just as grand and looking a little like a little gnome, sort of like Chagall looks now.

[01:05:31.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Really?

[01:05:32.74]

UNA JOHNSON: There he is, a typical Frenchman still, although he's considered so Mexican. He isn't Mexican at all. And the older he gets, the more French he looks. [They laugh.] He's a darling. I was so delighted to see him. [Laughs.]

[01:05:47.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of reception did a survey exhibition like that get? Because there are few surveys of American print.

[01:05:55.24]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, you see, Paul, what had happened, that society had done 50 prints of the year as they had also done 50 books of the year, and that was an old established show. And it was rather well-known.

[01:06:08.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but this was a 30-year—

[01:06:10.00]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, but this was a survey.

[01:06:11.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: At some point, yeah.

[01:06:11.86]

UNA JOHNSON: And they decided to do a survey, and I believe that—I believe Catlin [ph], yes—Catlin was in charge of the society at that time. He was the Director. And—

[01:06:28.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there were a number of built-in—

[01:06:30.68]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I made the selection of prints, beginning with the Brooklyn Museum collection, where the show was held. And I don't remember whether that toured or not. I think maybe it did, yeah, in a few places.

[01:06:48.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, did you get a lot of response from an exhibition like that? Where there many—was there much press, or many people?

[01:06:56.48]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, we got quite a good press, always. I don't have any of the clippings here because I left them at the museum, but the first National Print Show, for instance, had a terrific press. The *Times* gave it space—not only space, but quite a few illustrations. And we got in the magazines also at that time, and it was one of the—we often got a fairly good press. Finally, the National Print Show was a repeat, and as John Kennedy said, you can't say much about the new things. I mean, what else? And he kind of lost interest in it, but he always mentioned it.

[01:07:49.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:07:49.73]

UNA JOHNSON: He still does mention it.

[END OF TRACK AAA_johnso71_8705_m]

[00:00:04.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's on. It's January 19, [1971]. Paul Cummings talking to Una Johnson. This is part two. As you said, we could talk about the National Print Exhibition. And there were some more factors involved with its organization.

[00:00:21.57]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. I think we'd mentioned the fact that the size of the print had changed a lot since the Library of Congress, and a number of other print clubs had started their shows. And I did want to make the statement that there had been no, really, national exposure of prints, no national exhibition in the greater New York area, ever.

[00:00:51.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:00:52.41]

UNA JOHNSON: And that it seemed wise to start this one, especially as this was about the mid-decade, or a little later in the '40s, when the Atelier 17 was going at its height, and every print person rather wanted to somehow either walk through Atelier 17, or something, because it was a very exciting place with all the refugee artists from France, and other European countries were there, including Miró, and Masson, and Chagall, and Max Ernst. All of those people were there. And so they were working right along on their own work, and so it was exciting. And those were two other motivating concerns when we started that, the first National here. And so it was—I think that maybe covers it a little better than we had mentioned.

[00:02:04.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how—did you know Hayter? You must have—

[00:02:06.97]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes, I knew him very well. I guess everybody of our generation knew Hayter [laughs]. But he was a tremendous force, because he had such a tremendous personality, and he got everybody involved. And he got them involved in a different professional way than the American artists had known. Because we haven't had a lot of craftsmen who were printmakers, and not necessarily artists. And he was interested in painters and sculptors using the print media as another means of expressing whatever they had to say. And this was a great innovation for a lot of people.

[00:02:55.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, it's interesting, the differentiation between the printmaker, and the painter or sculptor who makes prints. How is it that some people just become printmakers

and do nothing else? And what—

[00:03:08.05]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't know how they do that. I think they get absolutely, completely involved in the technique, and in the doing of it.

[00:03:20.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The kitchen.

[00:03:20.76]

UNA JOHNSON: And in the seeing what comes off that plate, or block, or whatnot. It's one of the things. But they—of course in the earlier times, American artists—it was the architects who went abroad, and then they made a little extra money on the side by making prints of picturesque views of Paris, and London, and all these—

[00:03:50.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Buildings.

[00:03:51.07]

UNA JOHNSON: —buildings, you see. And this was the taste, and this was what the dealers said would sell, and it did sell. So the people, then, who did this kind of thing were architects, who knew how to do a perspective on buildings, and not necessarily painters or sculptors, who would never do that kind of thing very much.

[00:04:13.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But there's this whole school of people who just sit there and work over a plate—

[00:04:21.47]

UNA JOHNSON: I know. And there are—and some of them are quite interesting, and quite good.

[00:04:28.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's so hard to figure out where they fit in history, though.

[00:04:30.95]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, it is hard. [Paul laughs.] And no, the very fact that there's been Haskell, and John Taylor Arms, and people of that sort who have been tremendous technicians, and quite good draftsmen, in a very meticulous manner, but they were very much against anything that was a new style, that was coming from Europe or Paris. I think they ignored it as much as they could and went on their own way [laughs].

[00:05:11.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I'm really thinking of so many of the people who make abstract images in their prints, you know, and they use textures, and fabrics, and leaves.

[00:05:20.28]

UNA JOHNSON: I know.

[00:05:20.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've seen all the—

[00:05:22.01]

UNA JOHNSON: The whole bit, yes. And you know, they're very strong-minded about what

they're doing. They don't want to—and Lasansky's philosophy has been that he attempted, and he fairly well succeeded, in making a print that would vie with painting. And just because you used a different technique, he didn't see that was at all out of line. He said there were painters who were only painters, did nothing else. They didn't even—weren't even good draftsmen.

[00:06:05.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, he's been an exponent of the large print for the last several years.

[00:06:07.84]

UNA JOHNSON: But he's done that. But he's kind of been boxed in his own studio, in his own little section there, and has, I think fairly resented the fact that he isn't always accepted in some art circles, and that the New York press didn't pay very much attention to his Nazi drawings, those big drawings, or even his prints.

[00:06:40.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

[00:06:41.05]

UNA JOHNSON: But he has such a following that that doesn't make any difference, because he sells everything he does and then some.

[00:06:48.28]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know.

[00:06:50.33]

UNA JOHNSON: And also, he means to put the price so it's comparable to—

[00:06:56.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where it should be.

[00:06:57.32]

UNA JOHNSON: —the painting. [Laughs]

[00:06:58.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The thing that's fascinating—someone told me recently in an interview that he's the highest paid state official, there in Iowa.

[00:07:05.12]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I wouldn't—

[00:07:05.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: He gets more than the Governor does.

[00:07:06.83]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.]

[00:07:07.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, it's true.

[00:07:08.15]

UNA JOHNSON: Is it so?

[00:07:08.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:07:09.15]

UNA JOHNSON: I would not doubt that. I remember, he came to New York one time, and he was feeling very badly because he was afraid he was getting in a rut, and he wanted to get out. And it was when he was on his way up to Deer Isle, or wherever, in Maine. He has house and studio. He has for years. He goes on a trail or something, all the way up from Iowa. And he was very concerned about maybe accepting something even less remunerative, because he was afraid he was getting in a rut.

[00:07:53.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:07:54.29]

UNA JOHNSON: And then, I guess, when he got really down to it, he decided that he couldn't do that. And he has—I think his children—he had quite a few children.

[00:08:02.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's got a large family.

[00:08:04.54]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think one of them is a sculptor, and one is a dancer, here in New York. And the others are—they must be through school, or in college. And he was very careful about not interfering with what they wanted to do because he thought that was important. He's a very interesting man. A very interesting man.

[00:08:33.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The thing that's always amazed me is, he has such an incredible reputation, and you know he's had—I can hardly think of a few exhibitions he's had in New York, or even in the East.

[00:08:45.70]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, very few.

[00:08:47.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:08:49.53]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think the Nazi drawings—the unfortunate thing about that was he limited the title so, because they had very little to do with the Nazi thing. I mean, he could have had a protest thing, or anything—disasters, or war, or anything [laughs].

[00:09:09.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:09:10.40]

UNA JOHNSON: But to pinpoint it, when he wasn't even in the running—I mean, he wasn't even an artist then. I think that was unfortunate. But he was determined. Nobody—there were quite a few people that tried to get him to change the title, and they said couldn't he make it more general? Because just to pinpoint it on one angle was not the best thing. But he wouldn't do it.

[00:09:42.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Interesting.

[00:09:42.23]

UNA JOHNSON: I think he felt that he had to do something about that situation, even though he had been removed or—I mean, he wasn't in that at all. He somehow felt that he had to do something about that. It was almost a psychological demand that he had to, you know—

[00:10:00.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting. He seems to be somewhat in the same position that Baskin is at this point. He stuck with his images, and repeat, repeat, repeat.

[00:10:15.68]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I think the Baskin—they're rivals. They're violent rivals. But I think that Baskin probably has a much wider range of intellectual interests. But on the other hand, Baskin hasn't cared about how he turns out—I mean, his editions, he doesn't care about. And I don't mind that he makes big editions, but the price is the same [laughs].

[00:10:51.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

[00:10:53.18]

UNA JOHNSON: And Lasansky does not do that. He sticks to his editions. Or if he has a few over, then it's always artist's proofs. You know, doesn't just grind them out. Well, he can't, because he's got that color thing going on, on a big press, and enormous plates. But Baskin, I think, it's seldom that he prints his own work now.

[00:11:20.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Oh, no. He collects the money [laughs].

[00:11:23.81]

UNA JOHNSON: He collects the money.

[00:11:24.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:11:25.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Of course, Baskin has one of the greatest print libraries, probably, and incunabula, in private hands. I think it rivals Mr. Rosenwald's.

[00:11:38.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm—it may. I don't know.

[00:11:39.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, not—

[00:11:40.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's different.

[00:11:40.94]

UNA JOHNSON: It's different.

[00:11:41.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:11:42.29]

UNA JOHNSON: It's entirely different.

[00:11:43.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Illustrated books.

[00:11:44.51]

UNA JOHNSON: But it's illustrated books with a different slide—But he has Rembrandt drawings and prints.

[00:11:51.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know.

[00:11:52.97]

UNA JOHNSON: And he has some very unusual things. But then, he's a very strange and unusual man. [They laugh.]

[00:12:01.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's interesting. Who else is there that is almost—Baskin really thinks of himself as a sculptor most of the time.

[00:12:11.26]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes.

[00:12:13.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But yet his fame still rests, really, on his prints, because they're everywhere.

[00:12:18.97]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:12:20.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who else is there that is—and he's also had a lot of students, that are similar, that have been involved with his kind of imagery, and thinking.

[00:12:28.48]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Right, right. He has.

[00:12:29.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That there aren't very many other print people like that, are there?

[00:12:34.63]

UNA JOHNSON: No, certainly they're not. And there are so few people anymore who are working in the relief print, whether it is a woodcut or whatever surface they might use to be printed in relief. They're just not working in woodcut. It's, I suppose, like carving. It's a hard job.

[00:12:59.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:13:00.26]

UNA JOHNSON: And the younger group are working almost entirely then in silkscreen and lithography.

[00:13:07.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Photo offset.

[00:13:08.54]

UNA JOHNSON: And photo offset. [They laugh.]

[00:13:11.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know, I know. Well, you know, you must have seen, through the National Print Exhibition, a great change in materials. What do you think caused that? People just wanting new things to work with? They went out and looked, or—

[00:13:30.68]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I think it was a great experimental period. It was right as soon—right after the war or before. When Hayter came here, even in that studio in the '40s—early '40s—1940, '41, they were already using crushed linens and things on their sensitizer dye, their plates. And Hayter invented that white line, you know, the embossed white line, the way he used it. And so it was—all these new things were great challenges. And then even the paper they had, they still were getting their paper from Europe, mostly. But then that non-woven fabric material came in, too, and they were using that, or I guess—Baskin used that on some of the very large things he did simply because it was a way of doing it easily.

[00:14:45.06]

But then he found some paper maker who would make big sheets. But even the inks and the tools and the surfaces, the textures, all that, it opened up a whole new thing that had never been really in print. It had been in painting and in sculpture, but it hadn't been in print as much. And so you saw that coming in. And then, of course, after Hayter, then all those artists under his encouragement went out to various universities. It became a thing to have a graphic workshop. And that developed like mad, because there was Lasansky, there was Peterdi, there was Andre Roques. And there was—well, Sue Fuller didn't teach, although she did do some work with the children's classes at the Mod Art.

[00:15:51.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Karl Schrag taught.

[00:15:53.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Karl Schrag, Will Barnet, all those people taught in various workshops. And then, of course, you know, June Wayne came along with her lithography workshop, which was a great idea, and an awful shot in the arm, because lithography was just sort of trailing along with woodcuts and the intaglio. And of course, it was Schanker again who was doing his woodcuts, the abstract things, and building them as a composition rather than as a black and white key, hand-colored or something—

[00:16:38.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:16:38.53]

UNA JOHNSON: —or colored with colored blocks as—

[00:16:40.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:16:41.57]

UNA JOHNSON: So that the whole attitude changed. And then Lasansky was very strong in Iowa, and certainly he sent out third generation, really.

[00:16:56.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:16:57.05]

UNA JOHNSON: And so it's going until Hayter's influence is practically nil anywhere.

[00:17:03.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you still—you see it kind of outside the big cities, I think. In smaller places I've seen.

[00:17:09.50]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh yes, it has been there. There are some artists in—is it Tulane or somewhere? But it is—

[00:17:20.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's been around.

[00:17:21.41]

UNA JOHNSON: It's not very much. And the younger ones really don't use it.

[00:17:26.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well—

[00:17:26.84]

UNA JOHNSON: And Hayter doesn't either. He's doing entirely different things now, things which I don't much care for in his patterns or color. But he's mad about them and is interested in all that. But the change, I think—but I don't think that the change even then was as great as the change that occurred in the '60s, when the whole image was changed. All this that went on in the '40s was still the kind of classic imagery. And by classic, I also mean the abstract—the classic abstraction—so that that was not really a new image. That had come to us before. But the '60s, seems to me, were—they destroyed that whole classic image thought.

[00:18:26.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, there were a lot of inventive painters who got involved—

[00:18:30.82]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes.

[00:18:31.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —with printmaking. I know that—I've talked to a couple that went to Prague [ph] like Oldenburg.

[00:18:36.67]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes?

[00:18:37.84]

PAUL CUMMINGS: On Broadway there. He made a few prints. But he said, "Oh my God, printmakers." [They laugh.] You know, couldn't stand the atmosphere.

[00:18:44.39]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[00:18:44.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: He left. Of course, now that he's gotten back into it, he's become an extraordinary graphic character.

[00:18:51.94]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, again, the printmaking—printmakers have changed.

[00:18:58.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:18:59.59]

UNA JOHNSON: I think if you go to—I was looking through some old catalogs. And it's astonishing how the change is, color-wise as well as the old imagery has disappeared. I think that's all good. I think maybe the '60s are most exciting for that very reason.

[00:19:28.49]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, you had—well, that exhibition is a juried show, isn't it?

[00:19:33.56]

UNA JOHNSON: It started out to be a juried show.

[00:19:35.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:19:35.66]

UNA JOHNSON: And we first had five jurors, which got awfully unwieldy. And then we had three jurors. And then the material itself got so unwieldy, the handling of all those packets and all the paperwork. And the museum's budget had been cut on the packing department, and all that sort of thing, so that then the only—to avoid all that—oh, 1,500, 2,000 more prints coming in, it seemed the only logical thing to make it a selective thing. And I remember I discussed it with the Library of Congress and some other show, I think a Northwest group shows out there that Glen Alps had something to do with years before. And I said I thought we were going to do that. We were going to make it a selective show simply because of the physical problems we had to get stuff in and out.

[00:20:51.49]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you handle 2,000 prints?

[00:20:52.71]

UNA JOHNSON: It took us six months to get the stuff back, and the artists don't like that, and we didn't like it either. So, the Library of Congress said they could not do that, because they were a tax-supported institution, and they'd started that, and they were kind of stuck with it. And I think they were right. I think that they do have to do that. But they have a real problem every year.

[00:21:17.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Of handling every—

[00:21:18.53]

UNA JOHNSON: Of handling everything.

[00:21:20.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They still get as many submissions?

[00:21:22.80]

UNA JOHNSON: No, no. I don't think they do. I think maybe the time for the—certainly in the big Eastern urban areas, the time for the great compendium print show is perhaps—

[00:21:40.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Moving away.

[00:21:40.94]

UNA JOHNSON: —moving. It's moving away. We know too many artists now. We didn't then, you see. When I first started, we didn't even know who some of the artists were, or what they were doing in the print field. But now they have great exposure. They have it in their own neighboring area and almost anywhere they—

[00:22:01.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Galleries.

[00:22:02.86]

UNA JOHNSON: But I do notice that as I go around on juries, that the outlying places like South America, and the Hawaiian show, which is just starting their first one—there's a lot of interest in that because they have no—they've had no window out on all that.

[00:22:22.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And no dealers.

[00:22:23.23]

UNA JOHNSON: And no dealers. And so this is a great thing. And you see it in the '40s. There were only a few print dealers, and they weren't going to handle all this modern stuff. I mean, they were established old master dealers, or Currier and Ives, or what you will.

[00:22:37.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:22:38.38]

UNA JOHNSON: So that all those things have entered into it. And I think now, the thing that is important is a selective show of at least five to ten pieces by one artist. And—

[00:22:49.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you're showing people, rather.

[00:22:50.92]

UNA JOHNSON: So you're showing—yes, you're showing people, and what their contribution has been. And any more, too—artists work in such a very style and technique that one print really doesn't do the trick.

[00:23:04.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:23:06.06]

UNA JOHNSON: See, it just doesn't tell the story. So you need just four or five prints by an artist, or even ten. I'd love to see a show like that. I think it's much more stimulating than just a big circus of prints.

[00:23:20.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Endless, endless.

[00:23:21.30]

UNA JOHNSON: Although that is fun too, and it's interesting. It is not as rewarding.

[00:23:27.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I don't think so, ultimately.

[00:23:28.75]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But we've moved on, and I think that's good.

[00:23:32.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's good. What do you see? You mentioned jurying exhibitions, and I guess you've juried hundreds and hundreds of—how many prints have you seen?

[00:23:44.71]

UNA JOHNSON: I—[laughs].

[00:23:48.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you find when you go to, say, the West, or the Southwest, or the Midwest, or some other part of the Northeast? What do you see in locally-produced prints? Maybe an artist who lives in Cleveland, and shows around there but who doesn't have a New York gallery or doesn't show in Chicago, or Boston, or somewhere. Do you see the kind of work that kind of fits in, or is it removed, or do you do you see major printmakers who are out—[cross talk].

[00:24:23.92]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, yeah—

[00:24:24.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or is that difficult?

[00:24:25.90]

UNA JOHNSON: That's difficult. But the last—the Hawaiian show, which was the last one I—was just a few months ago—I was astounded—the coverage they were— It was open to all artists in the United States, 50 states. And I was amazed at the turnout from—and the geographical—

[00:24:57.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Spread.

[00:24:59.08]

UNA JOHNSON: —spread, which was incredible. But I must say that in the Hawaiian—in Honolulu, the Native artist there just hasn't—he's just beginning to do things. And the incentive hasn't been much at all. And of course, I think the Honolulu Academy of Arts has realized that, and they're making an effort. There are a couple of print galleries established there now, which is great. And some of them are connected with New York galleries, some with the San Francisco galleries, so that there really is not very much of a local art anymore. It's—

[00:25:48.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Communication has changed.

[00:25:49.54]

UNA JOHNSON: It's so rapid, and the—well, the *Artforum* is on every studio table and that sort of thing, you know?

[00:26:00.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:26:01.44]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] So it's instant. The visual image is almost instant everywhere. It's incredible, and it's been different.

[00:26:13.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I wonder if artists will complain pretty soon the way comedians complain that they can't use their material—you've got television, and everything uses it up so quickly.

[00:26:24.99]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Well, I think there might be something to that. Of course, the very fact that artists or styles change overnight is, I suppose, an indication that—especially how the Pop stuff was awfully short-lived when you—the life of it was fairly short when you think of it.

[00:26:52.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ten years. Some of them are still going on.

[00:26:54.84]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, some of them are still going on.

[00:26:56.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. The best ones.

[00:27:03.05]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I guess you can't just put any special stamp on it that says, "Well, no, that's the way it is here or there." I felt that the Hawaiian show had very sophisticated pieces, and they had sent out their brochures on the show to all universities, and colleges, and art museums, and, well, everywhere, so that their coverage apparently had been enormous. And as a result, there were many artists that I had never seen their work before. And then I looked at their birth dates, and it was kind of astonishing. [They laugh.]

[00:27:48.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:27:49.28]

UNA JOHNSON: You know, '30s, and—you know, late '30s, 1938. And you think, well, that's not so long ago—'42? [They laugh.]

[00:27:57.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:27:58.85]

UNA JOHNSON: Gosh.

[00:28:00.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're getting there, aren't they? Well, that was—what were some of the other major exhibition projects you were involved with up to, say, 1950, besides the National Print?

[00:28:16.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I had done the "History of the American Woodcut."

[00:28:19.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. That's one thing we were going to talk about—

[00:28:22.39]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that was—I've forgotten what year that was.

[00:28:28.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: 1950, I—American Woodcut?

[00:28:31.13]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, it was 1950.

[00:28:32.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The 1670s to 1950s.

[00:28:34.85]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[00:28:35.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about? Because that's a big survey show, and obviously—

[00:28:39.32]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I got awfully interested in—I'd seen big circus prints, as big as a door. And they were woodcuts, little woodcuts, used like stamps. So, [inaudible] around the edge, and the big center attraction, or whatever that was, or Tom Thumb or whatever. I mean, it could have been anything. And some of those were very interesting.

[00:29:03.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they were woodcuts.

[00:29:05.03]

UNA JOHNSON: They were woodcuts. [Cross talk.] And some of them were quite big, and they were chiseled out with a machine, with a what—is it? An adze. And then the final finishing work was done by hand, by a regular chisel and a knife, I suppose. And that was the way—the circus posters, the early circus posters.

[00:29:33.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I know a lot of them were lithography, too.

[00:29:36.08]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, they were. But even the earlier ones, the Antiquarian Society up in Worcester had some divine posters which they didn't allow me to borrow, even though I said I would have them backed and they wouldn't be folded up like that, and eventually go to pieces, although those were on fairly decent paper. But they wouldn't allow them out of the building. So, I was very sad about that. And at that time, the Library of Congress had a ruling that they could not lend out the building, either. That has since changed. But at that time, it was—and that was—it was going to take an act of Congress to do that, so that a lot of the broadsides, the early broadsides, were not—

[00:30:40.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Available.

[00:30:40.86]

UNA JOHNSON: —available.

[00:30:41.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:30:42.72]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was amazing to see often how crude the work was, but very interesting.

[00:30:51.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Strong.

[00:30:51.69]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then, of course, during the Timothy Cole stuff with the engraving that finally got to be just a routine photographic, really. That early part was very exciting, of course.

[00:31:10.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, is there a catalog for that? Because I've never been able to find—

[00:31:13.79]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, that's out of print. I have a couple of them. I don't know whether I have an extra copy or not.

[00:31:19.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible]

[00:31:20.21]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was—it's out of print. I mean, it's been out of print a long—and there were 5,000—I believe we printed 5,000 of those, which was a large edition.

[00:31:30.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, that was pretty much—

[00:31:32.98]

UNA JOHNSON: So—but those are all out of print.

[00:31:35.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of reaction do you get from an exhibition like that?

[00:31:38.80]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, we got an awfully good press on that because it had such a variety of stuff in it, you know?

[00:31:44.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So kinds of people could write about it.

[00:31:45.83]

UNA JOHNSON: All kinds of people could write about it, and they did. And we got a lot of coverage. And I went into the American almanacs, and that was a lot of fun too, the Davy Crockett illustrations in those. We blew up some of those, and those were great, fantastic things. [They laugh.]

[00:32:10.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, It's interesting, you know? Speaking about blowing up the prints and things, print exhibition installations always seem to have a problem because I don't know

what—it's because it's just flat paper, or something?

[00:32:27.82]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I think also, the variation that goes from a postage stamp up to a—

[00:32:34.25]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wall size.

[00:32:35.45]

UNA JOHNSON: —wall size.

[00:32:36.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:32:36.47]

UNA JOHNSON: And it's very hard to make something—make it look exciting, although I think that the Picasso show at the Museum of Modern Art—

[00:32:51.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The recent—

[00:32:52.13]

UNA JOHNSON: The recent one was a terribly exciting show, although it was so cramped in there.

[00:32:58.70]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You just got blind after a while. [Inaudible]

[00:33:00.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Just blind. But I mean, it was so exciting that you kind of forgot about that. But I think that space doesn't lend itself to prints very much, and I don't know what it lends itself to.

[00:33:14.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Broke it up in a funny-shaped room.

[00:33:16.80]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And you don't know where you are, and you don't know where you've been—

[00:33:20.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:33:21.23]

UNA JOHNSON: —in the gallery, you know? And suddenly, you wake up to the fact of where are you. You've made a wrong turn. [They laugh.]

[00:33:26.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've been looking at that same Jacqueline Albers [ph.] for hours. [They laugh.] So, no, because I've seen print shows and all kinds of museums, and galleries, and spaces, and they've all somehow seem to present an installation problem.

[00:33:41.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:33:42.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Quite different from painting.

[00:33:45.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, because there always are more of them too. I mean, you can get—

[00:33:51.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —all the glass and—

[00:33:54.29]

UNA JOHNSON: A painting show can be 25 or 50, and that's a big show for painting, or a one-man show, say. But a print show can be 150, you know—

[00:34:09.49]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:34:09.77]

UNA JOHNSON: —and often is, although I think it's too many. I think it is too many.

[00:34:14.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, too, too much.

[00:34:17.21]

UNA JOHNSON: And the bigger the print got, the easier the show got to be, though, really, because—

[00:34:21.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's fewer.

[00:34:22.62]

UNA JOHNSON: —you could, you know, present it a little more easily. But it's very hard to present little things as precious little things. And also, people just haven't the patience to look sometimes.

[00:34:37.64]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:34:39.37]

UNA JOHNSON: Some do. There's always a few diehards who are going to look at every solitary thing, you know [laughs], including me.

[00:34:48.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] What would it take those people to join?

[00:34:55.51]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] I think something has to do with the glass, though. I think that's one of the great problems. And that glare-proof glass is deadly.

[00:35:05.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It just kills everything.

[00:35:05.98]

UNA JOHNSON: It just kills everything.

[00:35:06.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:35:08.38]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't know. I suppose maybe in air-conditioned rooms, now you could have prints that weren't masked like that. But then they're lifted, I suppose. I don't know.

[00:35:18.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are people who want to touch them, then, because of the textures —

[00:35:21.23]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, you see.

[00:35:21.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —reliefs and things like that. Yeah.

[00:35:25.03]

UNA JOHNSON: It's always a—I just ignore the glass. I have reflections here or there, and I know that. But I just ignore that. But most people can't do that.

[00:35:33.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. [Inaudible]

[00:35:34.22]

UNA JOHNSON: I mean, it's an occupational kind of adjustment, I guess, that you make [laughs].

[00:35:42.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, one thing I was going to ask you about here which has always interested me is the Print Council, of which you became a member of the board in about 1956 or something.

[00:35:52.85]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[00:35:56.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had it been going for a while?

[00:35:57.89]

UNA JOHNSON: No, that was sort of the—I was one of the founding members.

[00:36:04.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that whole thing start?

[00:36:05.99]

UNA JOHNSON: It was through the aegis of Mr. Rosenwald, Lessing [Julius -Ed.] Rosenwald. And he was very anxious to establish some kind of a communication among print people, because he felt the lack of it. He just knew a few collectors he knew, and he wanted to know more people.

[00:36:26.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:36:27.29]

UNA JOHNSON: And so I think—although he wasn't always so interested in the modern things as he was in all the little ins and outs of Old Master printers, he was very broad-minded in trying to get the print before the wider public. And he started out by having a those traveling shows, which were costly, and which never satisfied anyone, because you always had to leave out someone or someone was in that they thought shouldn't be in, and all these problems. It's the same old age problem, an age-old problem of that. And then they were going to start a publishing program. And they have done some of that. And—

[00:37:24.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they did the Walter and Zigrosser book.

[00:37:26.80]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, those things. And they were going to do "artist proof," I believe. But there was an editorial problem there that they wanted control of what was going into it.

[00:37:46.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Pratt wouldn't allow it.

[00:37:47.38]

UNA JOHNSON: And Pratt wouldn't allow that, and I think they were right.

[00:37:50.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:37:50.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Because why horn in on something? Even though that was, at that time—was rather precarious as a publishing venture. I think it's now a little better off. I don't know. I suppose it is.

[00:38:04.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Supposed to be sold at the New York Graphic.

[00:38:07.27]

UNA JOHNSON: Is it so?

[00:38:07.90]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're going to buy it, or do something with it. Yeah, they're in a lot of trouble.

[00:38:12.16]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it's kind of Fritz Eichenberg's baby, you know?

[00:38:18.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:38:18.46]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think it's been a fascinating one. It's been interesting. And certainly, it's the only thing we have on that kind of—

[00:38:29.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Luscious.

[00:38:30.46]

UNA JOHNSON: —luscious business. And they have kept up with some of the print centers and graphic workshops, and brought others—European artists into view that you might not have seen. So I think that they've covered a wide area. Maybe they've covered too wide an area. I don't know. But I always enjoy it. I wouldn't miss it. But again, it's a specialized publication.

[00:39:06.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what do you think the Print Council really was going to accomplish or attempt? Because I've tried to talk to [Theodore J.H.] Gusten about it, and it's incredible at times.

[00:39:19.51]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. [Laughs.]

[00:39:20.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You—he either holds forth or he—

[00:39:24.43]

UNA JOHNSON: He won't say a word.

[00:39:25.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —won't say a word.

[00:39:28.33]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] I don't think they had an awfully good idea as to what it was going to finally develop into.

[00:39:36.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they finally had a group of dealers that they sent little feels to, and then—

[00:39:40.64]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, that was the first big bone of contention within the council, because there were many of us who felt that that was not our province at all. It turned out to be a real pain in the neck.

[00:39:55.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:39:57.10]

UNA JOHNSON: But—and Mr. Rosenwald was finally convinced that it didn't work. And so they quietly let that die, although it was difficult. But the print people, they're such individualistic people, I think it's hard to—The thing that the council did do was to get all these people together once a year for two days, and everybody was very busy with either serious things, or gossipy things, and it was a lot of fun. And so you had lunch and dinner, and you had some speakers, or you had some papers and that sort of thing. It was merely a thing principally for people working in the field, rather than artists.

[00:40:53.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Scholars. Yeah.

[00:40:53.96]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think that was good. It was a very limited kind of group, a very esoteric kind of limitation, because it was either museum people, or library people or—and then they

allowed the dealers to come in on one day, and the artists on one day. And this got kind of difficult, you know? Obviously, it would.

[00:41:15.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:41:16.31]

UNA JOHNSON: But now I think that Mr. Rosenwald is now much older, and he's not interested in—he's not actively interested. And he's not given to making any kind of a foundation or fund for its continuance. And I have a feeling that it may not last after he is no longer here. All he's interested now in is to have the annual meeting for two days and get everybody together and—

[00:41:57.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have a nice talk.

[00:41:57.51]

UNA JOHNSON: —have a nice—and it is—it's like a sort of a fraternity, or something, you know?

[00:42:04.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:42:05.10]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think it had its place. I think it—I don't know whether it could have been developed further. It might have been. But it's—I found it was always a little difficult because most of the people were not—at the time it was founded, were very interested in the contemporary scene.

[00:42:29.89]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's Old Masters.

[00:42:30.90]

UNA JOHNSON: And it was Old Masters, and, you know, old fussy little things. They find a block from something, and they could sit there and look at that for ages, you know, which was interesting. But I always felt that—it was a kind of a one-sided interest. And I doubt that it will withstand many more years.

[00:42:53.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, what about the bringing in of the dealers? Now, that must have changed the whole personality for a while, because their purposes are so different from —

[00:43:02.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, well, they came in only on the second go-around, the second day or something. And—

[00:43:12.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But were they members, or they—

[00:43:14.44]

UNA JOHNSON: They were special members.

[00:43:15.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:43:16.48]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, there were various categories. There were the curatorial staff, the curatorial people, and the collectors. And then there were those people who taught art history with an angle toward prints and books, illustrated books, so that it really was an awfully loosely got-together thing. And I think the dealers finally just dropped off. They just didn't bother.

[00:43:56.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Didn't do anything for them.

[00:43:57.49]

UNA JOHNSON: It didn't do anything for them. So they didn't have—and they didn't have time to just play around for two days.

[00:44:02.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:44:02.95]

UNA JOHNSON: Although I do remember that the last meeting, the meeting in Boston, Peter Deutsch came up and gave a talk on the dealers' problems, and whatnot. He was quite interesting, and he didn't say anything most of us hadn't known, but he made the effort, and was up there a whole day.

[00:44:22.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what about, you know, scholarship amongst dealers? You must have a broad acquaintanceship with them.

[00:44:30.58]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I guess I'd just as soon not go into that. [They laugh.]

[00:44:35.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Does that mean there isn't very much there sometimes?

[00:44:38.02]

UNA JOHNSON: Sometimes, there isn't.

[00:44:40.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Always was something that's fascinated me because they—

[00:44:44.38]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, there's some terrible things that have gone on, too, and still go on.

[00:44:49.33]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they do.

[00:44:50.14]

UNA JOHNSON: But I think I'd just as soon skip that one [they laugh].

[00:44:55.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because it's—some of them seem to be fast steady, I think.

[00:45:02.32]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[00:45:06.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So—but you think the Print Council idea, if it were enlivened, could serve a purpose? Or do you think the whole idea—times have changed, and it wouldn't—

[00:45:19.78]

UNA JOHNSON: Uh—I would doubt that it would serve that much of a purpose, other than a kind of a fraternal thing—

[00:45:29.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

[00:45:31.97]

UNA JOHNSON: —where—and it did allow people from the West Coast and the Middle West and the East to get together. And sometimes there were interesting, awfully interesting discussions that went on about it—procedures like lending material, and rentals, and, you know, the—

[00:45:58.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Operation.

[00:45:58.34]

UNA JOHNSON: —kind of operation stuff—

[00:45:59.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:46:00.71]

UNA JOHNSON: —which got to be and is always a headache, and fraught with all kinds of problems, and safety things, too, that you don't know about. But I would guess that the new Print Curator might not be so interested in that. I believe there are some organizations going on in Europe where they're going to have just print curators.

[00:46:36.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? I haven't heard.

[00:46:38.29]

UNA JOHNSON: I think someone from Boston went. It's either in the process of being founded, or it is not in existence.

[00:46:47.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:46:48.32]

UNA JOHNSON: I think it probably isn't in existence yet. And that would be, I'm sure, a very scholarly thing, would have really—that would be the basis for it. And I think maybe that's a good idea.

[00:47:06.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because there's so much just incredible information that's askew in the world.

[00:47:12.98]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. It's—askew is right, yeah, and you hardly know where to begin.

[00:47:17.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

[00:47:19.37]

UNA JOHNSON: But I think this was a sound idea, to get together people who were really serious and who could present with some degree of scholarly concern and achievement, the many problems there that exist in the art field that no one touches.

[00:47:43.28]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, they just look the other way when they come up. [They laugh.] What about the advisory board of Pratt Graphic Arts Center? Because that was founded by Fritz Eichenberg, wasn't it? Or wasn't he involved with putting that together?

[00:48:00.44]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, he sort of was involved in getting that together, because he was trying to get a working department at Pratt. And then it was—and that got so cumbersome that they split it up, and have the school, Institute, and then the shop here on University or Broadway or wherever.

[00:48:24.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Broadway. What—because you've been on the advisory board there—is that an active position, or is it just—

[00:48:32.61]

UNA JOHNSON: Not really.

[00:48:33.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, telephone calls now and then, sort of thing.

[00:48:35.67]

UNA JOHNSON: They try to have a meeting. They have had meetings. But then they an advisory board, and then they have a sort of a steering committee that does meet, simply because they have to have advice, and sometimes fast, or get consent fast to do certain projects or certain things. But it isn't really that active. I don't think it really can be that active, either. There are people very much involved in it, people who give it financial aid and are in a position to do that. And I think that they call on them more often, which is their problem, you see.

[00:49:32.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But is it possible for the advisory board to institute projects or anything, or are they really—

[00:49:40.02]

UNA JOHNSON: No, they're instituted at Pratt, by the people there.

[00:49:43.89]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:49:44.22]

UNA JOHNSON: The director and the various people. I don't know—the man who was there, sort of a coordinator, is no longer there. What's his name? Christ-Janer.

[00:50:00.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Christ-Janer. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:50:02.96]

UNA JOHNSON: Albert.

[00:50:03.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

[00:50:06.68]

UNA JOHNSON: He was a kind of a liaison officer, I think. And Fritz really was the—managed the shop here. And I think finally, he gave up all his teaching at Pratt in order to devote time to that and "artist's proof," which came also out of that whole thing.

[00:50:30.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Actually, Pratt subsidized that lavishly.

[00:50:37.77]

UNA JOHNSON: Lavishly.

[00:50:38.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:50:39.44]

UNA JOHNSON: It took a sizable amount of money to do it. I admire them for doing it. I think they're always hard-pressed. But they always seem to manage, which is something.

[00:50:55.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there other organizations that you've served on, on a long-term basis like that?

[00:51:02.84]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, that I.G.A.S. [International Graphic Arts Society] thing, which Gusten manages, and I've served on that reluctantly. And I just—I said the other day to him not very long ago, I wondered why they really needed me on the board, because I had a straight line of no's, and I was the only one. And I was doing them no good.

[00:51:29.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:51:30.02]

UNA JOHNSON: And I was doing myself no good either, because I was voting. I was minority always.

[00:51:34.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:34.86]

UNA JOHNSON: But no, no, they had to have that. And so I—and it is a way of seeing some work that I wouldn't normally see otherwise. And I'm all for actually seeing the stuff.

[00:51:49.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:51:50.43]

UNA JOHNSON: In any capacity that I can do that, I am usually quite willing to do that, to serve.

[00:52:00.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I noticed, I got their new catalog a few days ago, and they really seem to be having a problem finding good things.

[00:52:10.54]

UNA JOHNSON: They are. I keep sending them material. I sent them quite a lot of names from the Hawaii show because I felt that there were a lot of young people there that they might be able to use. They have to get mostly younger people who are not that well-established because 210 editions is just really not much fun to do. Or of course, many of them don't do that. It's farmed out to—

[00:52:48.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, somebody prints it for them, yeah. And they don't pay them very much either, though.

[00:52:53.14]

UNA JOHNSON: No. They're better than they were. But when times are affluent, then this isn't any good either. I mean, as far as getting an edition from someone.

[00:53:08.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:53:09.34]

UNA JOHNSON: And sometimes, you can get an edition, well, from an artist who was just interested. Kennedy used to really contribute a print every now and again. So did Ben Shahn. And well, there were a group of them that did. But I always say that I think that group should—they should have young artists. And they do have, I think. And when you really compare this with the Ville de Gravures in Switzerland, and whatever the comparable one is in Paris, I think the quality that I.G.A.S. has is really not bad. The quality in some of those Ville de Gravures things is just for the birds.

[00:54:06.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:54:08.37]

UNA JOHNSON: And so many of them. But they have to get 15 or 20 a year in order to—and their organization is fully subscribed. They just run over one another. One great thing he got, he got two editions from Fontana before he died. And he held that one back, so that they weren't putting them out the same year.

[00:54:39.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:54:39.77]

UNA JOHNSON: And they were two beautiful frames, quite unusual. But many artists, too, don't object to the fact that they sell their similar prints in—their dealer sells them for four and five, sometimes ten times the amount. And they thought that that was not a good business thing.

[00:55:09.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:55:10.33]

UNA JOHNSON: But I think that it really hasn't mattered.

[00:55:13.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Doesn't affect.

[00:55:13.95]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't really think it does. It affects it quite—because this is quite a different audience. They come in, and they want guidance, and they belong to this. And when they branch out and begin buying—But I don't believe that this makes any difference. They may buy the same artist again at a dealer's price.

[00:55:36.84]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:55:37.36]

UNA JOHNSON: So I don't think it makes—I really don't think it matters. I think that's just an imagination.

[00:55:43.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:55:44.67]

UNA JOHNSON: They imagine this is going to—

[00:55:46.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Be a problem.

[00:55:47.16]

UNA JOHNSON: —be a great problem.

[00:55:48.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. The thing I was going to ask you about—while you were at the museum, were there any particular people who could be described as particularly interested, or patrons who would give either money or prints to the collection on a fairly consistent basis, or didn't you ever find anybody?

[00:56:17.32]

UNA JOHNSON: I never found anybody that did it consistently.

[00:56:20.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Every now and then.

[00:56:22.14]

UNA JOHNSON: Every now and then, they did.

[00:56:23.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:56:24.72]

UNA JOHNSON: But for instance, there was no one like that rather strange and eccentric man, Mr. Turner, that was a kind of a benefactor for the Metropolitan Print Department, and also the Museum of Modern Art. But again, he—and many collectors like their name associated with a New York institution, which is a little more, you know, flossy. [They laugh.] So we were always hard-pressed on that.

[00:57:07.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you know, the collection grew enormously while you were there,

didn't it?

[00:57:11.83]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, we bought everything we had a cent for, and some things I had bought which I didn't have a cent for. [They laugh.]

[00:57:21.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's what makes it fun. What do you do in cases like that?

[00:57:27.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, we bought Picasso's "La Minotaure." You know, that—it's one of the really great ones. It was dedicated by Picasso to Man Ray. And it has the big dedication on it, nice—Picasso's nice big scrawl, you know? And the print itself is beautiful. It's a beautiful impression.

[00:57:49.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:57:51.07]

UNA JOHNSON: And that was more expensive than they'd ever paid for a modern print, and they weren't about to. And I had tried to get it some years before that, when it was a lot less. But this is the old story, but I couldn't get it then. But in the next go-round, I did manage to get it, and they did think it was all right. But they had to—they drew from about three funds, and it had to go over a period of six months. I couldn't buy anything else.

[00:58:30.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now they would go out and buy one of those—

[00:58:32.47]

UNA JOHNSON: Now if they could find it, they'd pay just about—well, say, we paid, I think, around \$4,000 for that print.

[00:58:42.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's \$100,000 now.

[00:58:44.01]

UNA JOHNSON: And it's \$100,000 now.

[00:58:46.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are two on the market.

[00:58:48.13]

UNA JOHNSON: Are there two in the market?

[00:58:49.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:58:49.78]

UNA JOHNSON: Are there really?

[00:58:50.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Reese Cullen [ph] has one, and Marlborough.

[00:58:53.83]

UNA JOHNSON: And Marlborough has one? Did they come from an American collection?

[00:58:58.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't know. I don't know.

[00:59:01.07]

UNA JOHNSON: You know, there's—Curt Valentin issued a—

[00:59:10.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: A reprint.

[00:59:11.74]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, a reprint of that. It wasn't a reprint. It was really a facsimile copy.

[00:59:16.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:59:16.84]

UNA JOHNSON: But done very beautifully, and done all according to the proper designation. And he issued it for his special clients.

[00:59:28.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I've seen it.

[00:59:30.07]

UNA JOHNSON: And it's quite nice. I think Mister—I think Alfred Barr had one. I don't know whether he does now or not. But I think it sold for \$175 when it came on the market. And now I don't know if it would sell for much more—it would sell again for much more.

[00:59:47.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:59:49.39]

UNA JOHNSON: But the same way as—you know, all that.

[00:59:53.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It keeps on moving. [Una laughs.] It seems to be going so fast today.

[01:00:01.34]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, good. [They laugh.]

[01:00:04.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, are there other—as long as we're talking about acquisitions, outstanding acquisitions—I know this is—some list I saw has a Fragonard, Chagall, things like that that came in on the years.

[01:00:19.94]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, well, the Fragonard came in through—what is his name? The man who—he's—I don't know. I think he's still a member of the trustees, but he's inactive there. He—well, I don't remember it, but it's silly that I don't. His name is—but he bought it for a tremendous price, and then decided he'd give it to us. It isn't the greatest Fragonard. It's one of those early ones with his son riding on a pet dog or something. It's interesting.

[01:01:10.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You also got the Toulouse-Lautrec "Alfet."

[01:01:14.53]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. That came in under Schniewind's regime there. It was one of the great things he bought. And the other thing he bought was the complete set of Les Estamps Originale, which Karshan was featuring up in the Cultural Center—

[01:01:38.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:01:39.28]

UNA JOHNSON: —just this past season. And of course, then, during that time, you could buy Bonnards, nice Bonheurs for \$25, \$50, \$75. Nothing, you know? But no, they went begging, you know? Or they didn't go begging. Nobody seemed to be that interested.

[01:02:00.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:02:03.97]

UNA JOHNSON: And she even got most of those things through John Moriani [ph] who was really a representative of [inaudible] Paris. And the Rue Miserere, I got when it first came out. I think that was \$2,500, or something like that.

[01:02:32.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very little.

[01:02:33.16]

UNA JOHNSON: And now I don't know what it is. It's a lot more than that. I think it—

[01:02:39.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I can't remember what recent complete one—

[01:02:41.66]

UNA JOHNSON: I did see one, but I don't—

[01:02:43.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the plates now run everywhere from \$100 to \$150, or so.

[01:02:47.87]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, they do.

[01:02:48.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hundreds, some of them, yeah.

[01:02:50.39]

UNA JOHNSON: Some of the more popular ones, I think, are \$3[00] or \$400 apiece.

[01:02:57.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there any other special acquisitions that you remember, or things that have amusing stories concerned with their joining the museum collection?

[01:03:12.54]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't know. Oh, I—all kinds of— Schniewind had trouble with one of my old books. The customs thought it wasn't the proper kind of thing to let through [laughs].

[01:03:30.73]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a little woodcut, then?

[01:03:32.58]

UNA JOHNSON: It was one it was one of the lithographic ones.

[01:03:35.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[01:03:35.97]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think it was something or other, "Songs of B. Latsisse," [ph.] or something like that. But anyway, that was some problem there, and much consternation going on about that. But I don't remember anything other than that, that had caused a sensation. [They laugh.]

[01:04:07.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Let's see. I'm trying to do three different chronologies here, and I get mixed up a bit. 1952, you did "New Expressions in Fine Printmaking."

[01:04:27.60]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:04:30.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you decide to do these shows at a particular time, or was it just when the idea appeared, that was the time to do it?

[01:04:38.65]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, it seemed apropos always. It seemed like this was a good time to do it.

[01:04:44.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:04:46.60]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't believe I ever just picked anything out of the—you know, this would be a good show. And there were always staff meetings where you decided on your project of exhibitions, so that you didn't plan a show that was going to take over the same time as another major show. And that "New Expressions in Fine Printmaking," I believe I did about four versions of that through the years after that first one. And the first one was set up when they had the UNESCO meetings here. It must have been the late '40s or '50s.

[01:05:39.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was one in '52.

[01:05:40.92]

UNA JOHNSON: '52, that's it.

[01:05:41.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:05:42.48]

UNA JOHNSON: And that was set up for that purpose. And I had so much material. And we used a bulletin. One of the museum bulletin issues was devoted to that. And then later, I did another one with a great big—bigger book about it. And then I did two—I think two or three others, sort of, from time to time, much smaller, just in the gallery, with no fanfare.

Everybody was very interested in how print is made. It's such a kind of an American thing, you know? A sort of do-it-yourself point of view, I guess.

[01:06:22.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:06:23.49]

UNA JOHNSON: And it seemed to—they were interested because they couldn't seem to understand how it was done. And my idea was to get people to see how it was done. And you couldn't tell them the difference between a reproduction and an original print.

[01:06:42.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. No.

[01:06:45.45]

UNA JOHNSON: So that this seemed a logical kind of thing.

[01:06:50.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really show how—

[01:06:51.18]

UNA JOHNSON: And the artists loved it, of course, too. They were looking at all this. And our art school students were just mad about it. And it was very well—it was very well-received. And people tell me that the Art Institute graphic classes used it as a text, a quick text [Paul laughs], which I was pretty horrified by, because this was a strictly a layman's thing, information.

[01:07:21.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:07:21.93]

UNA JOHNSON: But there it was, and I still get requests for it.

[01:07:25.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

[01:07:25.98]

UNA JOHNSON: It's funny.

[01:07:26.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific.

[01:07:27.18]

UNA JOHNSON: It's out of print. It's been out of print a long time now.

[01:07:28.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Oh, I know. Those early catalogs, you just can't find them.

[01:07:33.06]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-mm [negative], you can't find them. I should think that the paperback people—Gus Peck always had an idea that one should do something—that same sort of thing. He tried to get me to, and I said, "Oh, you know, I've got so many things, I can't think of that."

[01:07:51.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[01:07:53.73]

UNA JOHNSON: But it's always of interest, especially when artists were using more than just a straight technique, like a straight woodcut or a straight etching. They were what we happily call a mixed media thing. But I think it was a great idea then. I don't know if it would be so great now, though.

[01:08:16.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay.

[END OF TRACK AAA_johnso71_8706_m]

[00:00:01.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It is the 29th of July, 1971. Okay. Could we start this side and talk something about the drawing book Shorewood Press published that you did? And how that came about?

[00:00:23.11]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. That was one of a large series of books. And I think it went from the 15th century on through the 20th. And I did the two sections on the 20th century. One was from 1900 to about 1945, to the sort of close of the Second World War, say. And then the second volume of the 20th century was from 1945 or (194)6 through to whenever it was published. And he was interested more in a picture book, which they all were. And some of the reproductions were quite good, and some of them, of course, were not so great. Then he put those two volumes together in a single 20th century thing, and just merely bound—it was just a binding job. There was nothing else. But it was, I think, fairly successful as a single volume. I saw—I was over in Spain, in Cuenca, Spain. And there, Saura had the two-volume work in his library. And he said he had seen the one volume, but he thought he'd liked the smaller volumes. It came to be quite a fat book.

[00:01:48.35]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right, right. Well, how did you select? Was most of that based on the Brooklyn collection?

[00:01:56.29]

UNA JOHNSON: No, no it was not. I had written quite a lengthy foreword on each of the two sections. And just in the course, then of trying to illustrate that text—and Shorewood was interested in having a lot of color things in it. It just developed that way, just as the story of—and it was international. It wasn't just America.

[00:02:29.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, no.

[00:02:30.62]

UNA JOHNSON: I believe he did issue one on American drawing later.

[00:02:35.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:02:35.60]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was—it covered a longer span—I think 19th and 20th century, or something like that. And—but then there was the French drawings, and then there was German drawings, and—

[00:02:50.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody.

[00:02:50.51]

UNA JOHNSON: Through the whole gamut of it.

[00:02:52.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Do you think that was successful, from your point of view?

[00:02:57.75]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I had tried to get material—get drawings that had not been reproduced before, trying to stay away from the ones that you always see in reproduction—

[00:03:12.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:03:12.65]

UNA JOHNSON: —because I thought it was contributing nothing much if you're just using the same old pieces.

[00:03:16.73]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Same old drawings, right.

[00:03:18.23]

UNA JOHNSON: And after all, there are thousands of others [laughs]. It's just a question of adding them.

[00:03:23.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let people see something new. [Una laughs.] Sure, sure. So, that came out. What—well, let's just backtrack here, because I noticed, chronologically, it was '55 when you did the 14 Painter-Printmaker exhibition. How did that come about? Was that—

[00:03:43.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, this group—

[00:03:44.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —a particular—

[00:03:45.14]

UNA JOHNSON: This group, it had a few exhibitions before. And it was—they were—this was an artist's idea and project. And so many of those people had been with the Hayter group one way or another. They'd been painters who were also with the Hayter group of printmakers. So then they began exhibiting both their paintings and prints, like the peintres-graveurs in France. They thought that would be interesting. And we picked it up, finally, at the Brooklyn Museum, and had one of their shows, and published a catalog with it. And I believe it was one of the first where—exhibitions in a museum, where the painter-printmaker combination was considered.

[00:04:45.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:04:46.25]

UNA JOHNSON: Most museums would maybe consider drawings by painters, but they never even thought of prints by painters. You know, I mean, this country wasn't ready for it, I don't think.

[00:04:55.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that was sort of at the time when it was just beginning.

[00:04:59.45]

UNA JOHNSON: Just beginning, yes. And, well, the painters in the United States weren't that interested. It was only recently when they came to that they could make quite a lot of money on them, in addition [laughs]. I think they thought it wasn't a bad idea.

[00:05:15.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think that may be part of it. So many of them complained to me. They said, oh, you know, we went to Pratt, or we go to Hayter. And there's all of this business about acid and plates and all of that stuff. And they said, we don't want to get involved with it. We just want to do our images.

[00:05:32.29]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Well, I think this is true. And I think that the French painters, many of them, didn't bother with that, too. I mean, all the lithographers, Bonnard. I think Matisse did bother because he was interested. And some of them were interested in the graphic thing. If they were great draftsmen, they often liked this kind of thing.

[00:05:54.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That seems to have been a great complaint about the kitchen, the cooking aspect.

[00:06:00.00]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. Well, of course, that, too, has been exploited with all these graphic workshops—you know, how to do it, kind of thing. And I think that's one of the weaknesses of the whole print field, is that the artist has become involved in the technique. And he may be a printmaker, rather than an artist. And this is one of the weaknesses of the field, you know? I mean—

[00:06:29.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but I don't understand how they develop that way, because the people who are just printmakers tend to have an iconography that's all in another world, and a whole different thing. And the painters, there were some personality conflict, I think.

[00:06:48.55]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's—

[00:06:49.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's two ways of thinking.

[00:06:49.78]

UNA JOHNSON: You can almost recognize if the print is done by a painter or a sculptor, or one that was done by a printmaker.

[00:06:59.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:06:59.38]

UNA JOHNSON: I think it started in the 19th century, English—you know, late 19th century, when they were—well, from Whistler on, really, when they—that's when they began saying first, and second, and third states, and editions, and signatures, and all this paraphernalia of the print field, which is horrendous sometimes, you know. And all the recording of those things, which, generally, an artist, unless he's terribly disciplined, isn't about to do.

[00:07:39.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:07:39.34]

UNA JOHNSON: So I think it came in there when all those British—[cross talk]. They worked into the 20th century.

[00:07:48.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:07:49.21]

UNA JOHNSON: And then they were taken—then Pennell, and John Taylor Arms carried on from there in the same tradition, really, with the same little bits and pieces of information that you needed for that, which is kind of fascinating, and sometimes kind of terrible, you know.

[00:08:07.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they seem to have—also, the printmakers alone seem to have gotten involved with odd-shaped plates, and cutouts, and all sorts of technical tricks, and mixing plates.

[00:08:21.97]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. No, they've lost track of the image in getting the—in the material and in the working with that material, I think.

[00:08:34.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That can be hypnotic, I think.

[00:08:37.09]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, of course, now, for instance, Peterdi, who is able to do painting, and prints, and all kinds of odd things with his prints—But I don't think it's such a technical performance. I mean, it doesn't seem to—

[00:08:56.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. He seems more interested in making his images apparent.

[00:08:59.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, it carries on through, you see.

[00:09:01.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:09:03.31]

UNA JOHNSON: And, well, of course, Lasansky is a printmaker.

[00:09:09.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:09:10.03]

UNA JOHNSON: He doesn't pretend to be a painter, or anything. And he's going to make prints that are paintings, in his own words. [They laugh.]

[00:09:18.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Larger and larger.

[00:09:21.32]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] But Schrag, again, is a painter and a printmaker. And I've forgotten who we had in those 14 Painter-Printmakers. We had Boris Margo. And I think Sue Fuller, Louis Schanker, Minna Citron. Well, all of them were involved with printmaking, one way or another. I guess Peterdi was in there, too. I'm not sure though.

[00:09:53.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. One of the things that we mentioned before, sort of piecemeal, are the biennials. And they kind of alternated, didn't they, American and European? Did that change depending on—

[00:10:13.94]

UNA JOHNSON: I think, at first, they had more international ones. Then the war came along, and it was impossible to do the international one. And the Library of Congress, of course, was a national one. And then there were various print clubs. And those were often national. And then the Brooklyn Museum came along right after the war. And they really couldn't afford to carry out an international project, but they could do a national one on a budget, on a limited budget. So there, again, was a national exhibition. And there for a while, as far as—I believe the Cincinnati Lithography Print Show was a biennial, and then it developed into entirely a color print, not necessarily lithography.

[00:11:18.35]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:11:20.51]

UNA JOHNSON: But there haven't been too many international ones that are continuing, you see, in the United States—more in Europe.

[00:11:31.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, what do you think—doing those exhibitions—and they were fairly scheduled, weren't they, compared to the other ones?

[00:11:44.43]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yeah. The Brooklyn Museum, I remember, we started out happily every year until we finally realized that we were working six, eight months on a show, on that one show, and that was a little ridiculous.

[00:11:59.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:12:00.17]

UNA JOHNSON So then we changed it to a biennial. I believe the Library of Congress, theirs is a biennial. And I don't know whether—I sometimes wonder now whether those big biennials are so important—have the importance that they did have.

[00:12:26.51]

PAUL JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:12:26.69]

UNA JOHNSON: You see, when the Brooklyn Museum Biennial started, there was no place, as I did say, where the artists could show enormous prints. The Library of Congress just didn't have space for that type of thing. They had these small cabinets. And this was kind of a cabinet thing.

[00:12:46.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:12:48.38]

UNA JOHNSON: But we could accept any size, and did, and did get them. And the artists were awfully excited about it, because they didn't—it wasn't—they hadn't had places enough to show. They didn't even know what one another was doing—

[00:13:05.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

[00:13:06.02]

UNA JOHNSON: —outside of the little areas where they worked. Maybe the New York people knew what their area were doing, but they didn't know what else was going on. So it was kind of a revelation to see all these things come popping up, you see?

[00:13:20.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:13:21.83]

UNA JOHNSON: And we got a terrific response always from those. We had—the first year, I think, we expected about 500 entries, and we had 1,000 or more. It nearly finished us right off at the beginning. [They laugh.]

[00:13:34.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, boy.

[00:13:35.42]

UNA JOHNSON: But now then they've done big prints, the Albany people at the university.

[00:13:40.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. A big print—

[00:13:40.78]

UNA JOHNSON: They did a large print, which, by the way, was a terribly interesting show. But I think now for the last few years, the print exhibitions that have been interesting are the ones where you see more than one or two prints by an artist, by a single artist, because artists are working in so many different ways, that one or two prints just doesn't cover it.

[00:14:10.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Doesn't—yeah.

[00:14:10.68]

UNA JOHNSON: I mean, for instance, if you take—well, just those artists who are working with either Gemini, or the Universal Art Editions out in the island, and Tanya [Tatyana] Grosman. Their point of view changes, and you have one print, but that doesn't tell the story one bit.

[00:14:31.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Particularly with Gemini, I think, where they go into everything.

[00:14:37.50]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. They're spreading themselves into all kinds of materials, of course.

[00:14:40.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, they say that they can manufacture anything somebody can think of, or something like that.

[00:14:45.73]

UNA JOHNSON: I know. I know. Well, I think Ken Tyler probably can. He's that kind of a person. He'd do it if it killed him [laughs].

[00:14:52.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you see their exhibition at the Modern?

[00:14:54.19]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

[00:14:55.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you think of that, as far as—

[00:14:57.37]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Well, I thought that the critics were awfully hard on Reva, because I don't think she thought that it was going to be the last word in any printmaking, or anything. She was just showing what one print shop could do, and how the multiples came out of that world, into everything. And I thought it was terribly interesting. I wouldn't want to see another one like it.

[00:15:28.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

[00:15:30.22]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Very soon.

[00:15:32.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it's interesting, because although there were 20 or 30 artists involved, there was a similarity in quality to the prints, whether it was Stella, or Albers, or Oldenburg, or Rauschenberg.

[00:15:47.99]

UNA JOHNSON: It takes on a kind of the—

[00:15:50.00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Taste of the—

[00:15:51.59]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah, the whole ambience of that particular shop. And it was different, for instance, from Tamarind.

[00:15:59.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:16:00.29]

UNA JOHNSON: Quite different from Tanya's, which was also another. But I don't—I wouldn't want to venture a guess as to how many of those prints were going to last for as far as, you know—

[00:16:19.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Interest.

[00:16:20.42]

UNA JOHNSON: —something that's representative of the, say, the early '70s.

[00:16:27.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, my feeling about Gemini is that sometimes everything gets cooked over a little too much.

[00:16:33.32]

UNA JOHNSON: It's—the brew is pretty heady [laughs].

[00:16:35.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. It's really a little more—[laughs].

[00:16:41.06]

UNA JOHNSON: And not much behind it sometimes, you know, just slamming colors around, and they can do it. That's the thing. And they, too, are interested in the doing of it. That's part of it. And I think the artists who went there, who worked there, had this feeling about it, too. It was doing it.

[00:17:00.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it's such an incredible place to work. I mean, it was tremendous power presses—

[00:17:05.83]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, I know.

[00:17:06.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And all those people in white aprons walking around [laughs].

[00:17:12.82]

UNA JOHNSON: I remember I visited them once when they were printing the Albers' "White Line."

[00:17:19.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that famous series. Yeah.

[00:17:22.54]

UNA JOHNSON: And Ken Tyler had a recorder in his desk. And whenever Albers called him on the telephone, it was almost always he just—

[00:17:32.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pushed the button.

[00:17:34.12]

UNA JOHNSON: —had it on. And he had mixed almost every color of ink that Albers had dreamed up on that pattern, the grid of his, you see. And that "White Line" thing, I mean, it was pretty great. I believe Ken Tyler lost a very good printer on that. The man just couldn't take it any longer, the discipline of that, the technical discipline. And he wondered why. I mean, "White Line," after all.

[00:18:07.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [Laughs.] But it's very different from any other print shop around.

[00:18:14.56]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, it is. It is, indeed. I think something is lost when it gets into the mechanics too much. But this is a part of our time.

[00:18:29.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, getting back to your exhibitions, as I remember, the artists were always great attenders of your shows.

[00:18:42.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

[00:18:43.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They all came out to see what everybody was doing.

[00:18:45.74]

UNA JOHNSON: We had tremendous—well, we really did it for the artists. And they all came from near and far. And it was—it got to be a real thing about getting into it. And I must say we were very fortunate. We only had a couple of really difficult situations when a print had been kind of tossed out and not accepted. But generally, they were very—they're now used to that, because they've had so many shows. But these were two people who I recall were rather fearsome [laughs] in their denunciation.

[00:19:31.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Who were they?

[00:19:33.12]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I don't think you need to know that. [Laughs.]

[00:19:36.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's always nice to know who's doing what when, you know? But the other thing that interests me is that those shows also seemed to set kind of a pattern for other places, or maybe—

[00:19:55.76]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm. I think we got—because the exhibition reflected some of the experimental things that were going on, we then did get—some artists were anxious to send us some of their newest and often really kind of exciting work, where an older, established exhibition, or annual, or biennial, they just sent whatever was sort of handy. But I do think that many of the artists made prints for this show—

[00:20:35.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They really thought about—

[00:20:35.61]

UNA JOHNSON: —the Brooklyn show. They really wanted it.

[00:20:39.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:20:41.31]

UNA JOHNSON: And then we had a ten-year resume of the print show, and they were very anxious. The artists were very anxious to have a new one to cap this, you see? And they really worked at it. And we often got prints that were still wet. [They laugh.]

[00:20:58.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Hot off the press.

[00:21:01.02]

UNA JOHNSON: They were hanging around my office—days. [Laughs.]

[00:21:07.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you did that one marvelous exhibition called Golden Years of American Drawings.

[00:21:11.67]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. That was—I believe that was one of the first concentrated exhibitions of American drawings. We had—and that was—well, I think most of that appeared in the 20th century too early. We had—

[00:21:32.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, in 1905 to '56.

[00:21:34.55]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:21:37.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you decide to do that exhibition at that point? Was there a specific reasons for it?

[00:21:42.57]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't remember, except that I thought it was about time, you know? It seemed I had seen so many European drawing shows. And we had been trying to collect American drawings, because our funds were better in the American field than anything else, in the other funds. And we had quite a few of them in our own collection. And then we borrowed a lot. It was quite an enormous show. It spread into the downstairs foyer, and upstairs. It was huge, bigger than I expected.

[00:22:23.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They grew and grew.

[00:22:25.19]

UNA JOHNSON: But that's what happened.

[00:22:26.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Was there a catalog for that, or—

[00:22:28.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, there was a catalog.

[00:22:29.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There is a catalog, isn't there? Yeah. Did you—in the years of doing drawing shows, and print shows, and the watercolors, and things, did you find that they reinforced each other, or they were variations on a theme from, I mean, your own interest in finding out about the artists and their work?

[00:22:53.52]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I think—

[00:22:54.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or were there just so many different people involved?

[00:22:57.60]

UNA JOHNSON: There were an awful lot of people involved of various periods. There for a while, artists—well, just before and after, or during the American Abstract Expressionists,

there weren't that many drawings being done, that is that artists were showing.

[00:23:23.25]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:23:23.40]

UNA JOHNSON: They had them often in their studios, but they never thought of showing them. No one was interested.

[00:23:27.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:23:28.77]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think the New York area has never really been that interested in drawings. I think the Boston area is probably one of the greatest areas for collecting drawings and prints, but mainly drawings. Probably because there were a few great collectors based around there. And well, of course, the Fogg was there, and the other museums. But drawings have really—there are so few private collectors—there were so few private collections of drawings, and then, again, as now, they are not so interested in the American drawings as they were European, or even Old Master.

[00:24:22.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But there's an interest in Modern drawings, except the prices, again, are so tremendous.

[00:24:26.48]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, yeah. Well, drawings and prints, both. I mean, if you're going to buy a drawing—a print, for \$200, \$300, \$400, \$500, \$1,000, you're getting right into the drawing and watercolor field.

[00:24:47.35]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:24:47.68]

UNA JOHNSON: And some of them are close to the paintings now. [Laughs.]

[00:24:50.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's extraordinary, the way the prices have zoomed up. Well, how did that affect acquisitions at the museum? Because you obviously, had limited funds there.

[00:25:02.98]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, we bought things that weren't very expensive. [They laugh.] And we did get some gifts. But not all that much, because, again, the Brooklyn public wasn't buying. The collectors were not basically in Brooklyn. There are quite a few more now than there were when we started that. But we had some sketchbooks from the late 19th century that came in as bequests, or something. But nothing great, again. And I had a little exhibition of sketchbooks by artists, American artists, which was fascinating, but difficult, because you could only show two pages of them.

[00:25:58.16]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, did you have many people in Brooklyn—I think we talked about this a little bit before—who were interested in patronage of the museum, who would give purchase funds?

[00:26:09.29]

UNA JOHNSON: Only later. It was rather strange. When—early in the 1900s, there were a lot

of Brooklyn families who supported the museum. And they went off, as did the museum supporters, and bought whatever they felt like, and brought it back. And maybe it was good, and maybe it wasn't. But they were interested enough to do it. And then there was the exodus when all those older families moved somewhere else, either on the Island or the country, or into New York. Then that was—then there was a sort of a lull in all that. And I believe now, again, in the last, say, ten years, there are many more people who are terribly interested in supporting the Brooklyn Museum. And it's—well, it has its appeal, because a lot of children and young teenagers went through all that business with the museum. And now they're grown, and they kind of—

[00:27:21.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Remember it.

[00:27:22.19]

UNA JOHNSON: —remember it.

[00:27:22.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:27:25.94]

UNA JOHNSON: So—but I don't think that the collections are there at all within Brooklyn. I think most of our bequests have come from people outside the basic Brooklyn area.

[00:27:42.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That's funny.

[00:27:44.91]

UNA JOHNSON: I think this is true, certainly in prints and drawings, where we're doing the Modern thing, rather than in the Decorative Arts, for instance. And they were interested in the Egyptian department. But certainly not—no one ever bought anything in that. Of course, the Egyptian department was funded—was rather well-funded for a long time.

[00:28:13.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, so it was a very fashionable thing to be involved with—

[00:28:16.35]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, indeed.

[00:28:16.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —at a certain point in history.

[00:28:18.53]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:28:23.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. So there were really very few—you didn't have any special purchase funds, like Larry Aldrich was set up at the Museum of Modern Art, and people like that.

[00:28:32.15]

UNA JOHNSON: No, we didn't have any.

[00:28:32.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, dear.

[00:28:32.96]

UNA JOHNSON: We had a couple of trustees that were always friendly. And that was always nice. But there weren't enough of them.

[00:28:40.09]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, no.

[00:28:41.92]

UNA JOHNSON: And we had Mr. Louis Ledoux, who was an Orientalist, really. And he had—his children still have a place up in Cornwall, which was a very nice sort of Japanese house.

[00:28:59.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Well, he had an immense collection, didn't he?

[00:29:01.78]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. He had beautiful prints. And Mrs. Ledoux collected Chinese, and the fancy kimonos, and things. And they had beautiful taste. And he was always very helpful and very warmly supportive. But most of the board members were more interested in the Decorative Arts, you see, and the American rooms, and that sort of thing.

[00:29:34.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Did you get any prints from collection, Ledoux?

[00:29:36.40]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, we did.

[00:29:37.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did.

[00:29:37.62]

UNA JOHNSON: He gave us some of those giant Primitive prints, which are very rare, the ones before color came in, you know—the late 17th century stuff—I mean the 18th century stuff, which was great. So, the big single actor prints. We have about five or six of those. And he gave us some Harunobus when he—he always refined his collection. He had 250, and he would have no more than that.

[00:30:06.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:30:06.72]

UNA JOHNSON: He kept refining it, you see? And so whenever he—he often gave us the print when he found another one he preferred. And I think the public library got all the Utamaros, because they had a basic collection of Utamaro. And I believe the Metropolitan bought the rest of the prints, the rest of his collection. So he had it as an investment, too, for his sort of legacy. And he wasn't set on keeping it together. That hadn't been a part of his interest.

[00:30:50.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But he did an immense amount of work and time with it.

[00:30:53.38]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes, and very scholarly work. He spent—he was really a scholar, and spent most of his time doing that. He couldn't be bothered with the business. And he didn't even attempt to.

[00:31:04.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fascinating.

[00:31:06.40]

UNA JOHNSON: But a fascinating man. And Mrs. Ledoux still comes up here in the summer. And his daughter lives in the—and her husband, live in the house in the summertime in Cornwall. They come over. They go over here quite often.

[00:31:25.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. Well, were there other collectors like him that uh—were important?

[00:31:33.46]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, there was—yes, there was a Mr. Lockwood, who collected American paintings, early American paintings, and then was interested in antique American—antique furniture, and had his own fine collection. But they were interested more in the American rooms, for instance, you see?

[00:31:57.00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Right.

[00:31:57.33]

UNA JOHNSON: That sort of—the more Decorative side. And then there were a couple of trustees who were interested in the Primitive, but not too many. Although, the collection was very good.

[00:32:11.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you find the trustees reacted as tastes changed in the artists?

[00:32:17.58]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, they never liked anything that I really got. [They laugh.] They just put up with me.

[00:32:25.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, goodness.

[00:32:26.70]

UNA JOHNSON: And at the time, it wasn't that much money. It wasn't \$50,000, or the cost of a painting, or a very handsome chair, or a Mandel, or something like that. The money was just peanuts in comparison for many years. And well, I was fortunate they didn't—they seldom turned me down, which I do—I am grateful for that. [Laughs.]

[00:32:59.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's good, good.

[00:33:01.05]

UNA JOHNSON: But they just put up with it, because they didn't like the modern—and we were doing 19th and 20th century.

[00:33:06.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:33:08.19]

UNA JOHNSON: They could stand the 19th, but the 20th century was too much.

[00:33:11.28]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's getting too difficult.

[00:33:12.51]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] Maybe they were right. I don't know.

[00:33:19.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you do from there? [Una laughs.] Well, what—you were involved with all sorts of other activities besides the museum. I mean, you were jurying exhibitions, and writing pieces here and there.

[00:33:35.13]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

[00:33:37.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you—did you do this purposely, or did a lot of these things come to you because you were at the museum?

[00:33:42.93]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, a lot of them just came, and then I always got involved. And there I was, because it looked interesting, you know. It looked terribly interesting. And I thought, oh, well, I could do that.

[00:33:52.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Squeeze another hour in the day.

[00:33:54.72]

UNA JOHNSON: Another hour in the day. I counted up one time, and one year we did—in one ten-year period, we did something like 40 major exhibitions. It was just terrific. I was frightened when I counted it up. [Laughs.]

[00:34:15.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lucky it was afterwards. [They laugh.]

[00:34:19.14]

UNA JOHNSON: But you get involved with something, and you can't let it alone, I think. That was one of the—and that was one of the joys there, that you could do a lot—they would allow you to do a lot of things if you could work it in. They didn't say you have to do so-and-so, or anything of that sort. But it was—there were a lot of juries I served on, and I still seem to do that. It's interesting. It keeps you up with what's going on.

[00:34:57.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, you can see the newest of—yeah, yeah. That's true. There are very few other ways one could do that, really.

[00:35:05.76]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I know. I went to the Honolulu Academy of the Arts last year. It was early this year, in fact. And they had a very good prize package. So artists from all over the states—

[00:35:25.96]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Submitted to it.

[00:35:26.44]

UNA JOHNSON: —submitted. And there were a lot of new people from the West, and the Middle West, and the Southwest, that I had never heard of before. I found it very fascinating. And things like—there was a whole series of automobiles that they were doing, great big prints with great big cars—

[00:35:46.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: In California.

[00:35:46.63]

UNA JOHNSON: —looking down at them, up at them, every direction. It was amazing to see them all together. It's fascinating, kind of terrible—highways, you know?

[00:35:57.28]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, that's part of the landscape out there.

[00:35:59.71]

UNA JOHNSON: But the different points of view and the technical performance is always pretty high. It isn't always—what they say isn't always successful, I think. But it's not any amateur kind of production.

[00:36:23.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what about the Library of Congress? Were you involved with some of their—

[00:36:27.37]

UNA JOHNSON: This last show I was. As soon as I retired, then they had me on their jury. [They laugh.]Before that, I was a competitor. [They laugh.]

[00:36:33.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

[00:36:35.04]

UNA JOHNSON: No, they were terribly nice there. And this year they did have an enormous—a lot of entries. You see, Michael Maser, and John Paul Jones, and I were the jurors this year. And the artists were—those artists are young artists. They're well-known for what they do. And then I had been in the print field for far too long. [They laugh.] And it was very funny, because they would not tell you the names of the artists, the Library of Congress jury. After it was all—then you could go back to see what it was. But I knew so many of them that they'd nearly lost their mind. I said, "Oh, is he—is so-and-so doing that now?" [Paul laughs.] And they—[inaudible] [they laugh]. But it was kind of silly, because the artists—we all practically knew what was going on.

[00:37:38.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Knew. Yeah. Did they do that normally or is that—that's not peculiar?

[00:37:42.81]

UNA JOHNSON: They've been doing that for some years.

[00:37:44.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because anybody who really sees can tell by the images, who—

[00:37:48.14]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I don't know what their point—I think—I never saw the show after it got all set, but I would have liked to have seen that show, because it was quite a different thing.

And I thought—they felt, the people at the Library of Congress, who were very involved with it, the whole thing, were very intrigued with what had come in. Although, many of them there were prone to think that the American printmaker had a lot of prints, but he didn't always say that much. But they are a little jaded because they have so many millions of prints. [They laugh.]

[00:38:31.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, just going back again to the collectors, have you had very many collector friends who have been interested in your ideas about things, or would ask you questions about their own collecting?

[00:38:49.64]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes. There have been quite a few people who have come in, or written in. Or they've had some, many times, questionable pieces that they wanted to know about. And that was always interesting. Sometimes the things they brought in were horrendous, of course. They should have never been on the market. But I think, though, that, by and large, the Brooklyn Museum didn't get as many of the collectors who collected Modern prints, because they could go to the Modern Art, or even the public library, instead of coming out to the Brooklyn Museum.

[00:39:38.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there just weren't that many collectors living in Brooklyn.

[00:39:41.06]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's right.

[00:39:42.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's amazing how important the collectors are to the life of a museum.

[00:39:45.11]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, it is indeed. It colors the tack the museum sort of takes sometimes, and certainly the support it gets.

[00:39:55.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:39:58.72]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I think the reason we worked on such a tiny budget was simply because we had no private support for 20th century works.

[00:40:17.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were very interested in German Expressionism, or is it just that you always seem to have good prints that were—

[00:40:25.55]

UNA JOHNSON: No, I was very interested. I became very interested through Karl Nierendorf, and Curt Valentin, and J.B. Neumann, and then Carl Schniewind also had been involved with the European print, so that I got a lot of background in that.

[00:40:54.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But did they have a specific appeal to you, or was it just that they were constantly available?

[00:41:02.15]

UNA JOHNSON: No. Their gutsiness kind of got me. They weren't romantic. They weren't sweet. Sometimes they were frighteningly German, but you know, I kind of liked that. And

you didn't see it all over. And we started out with quite a good collection. We had a few pieces. And then J.B. Neumann sold us quite a bunch of material, and then some of his friends bought parts of his collection and gave to us.

[00:41:38.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:41:38.70]

UNA JOHNSON: At his suggestion.

[00:41:40.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I didn't know that.

[00:41:42.03]

UNA JOHNSON: And J.B. was a great fan of the Print Department at the Brooklyn Museum. He loved the Brooklyn Museum, because he loved the eclectic art, all kinds of art, you see? I mean, this is one thing about the German print dealer and collector. They're often so eclectic. Now, J.B. was interested in Primitive art and American Indian art. He was interested in all kinds of art, where many American dealers are interested only in one small phase of it, you see—maybe 19th century America, maybe even 20th, or whatnot. But these men, Curt Valentin, and Nierendorf— they had a very good eye. Neirendorf was the first to show Nevelson, for instance. And that was kind of way out for that time. And he had some beautiful Primitive art pieces. And he bought American things as soon as he got over here— didn't hesitate.

[00:42:50.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That's interesting.

[00:42:51.81]

UNA JOHNSON: And Curt always had some Americans, you know?

[00:42:54.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The European dealers who came here were more adventuresome than the home-grown dealers.

[00:42:57.44]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, they were—much, much more. They were much more, really, basically, sophisticated, too, visually sophisticated, I think. They had come into it from a long period of art history. They knew it. They knew it. I thought that a Curt Valentin was one of the greatest dealers. He was opinionated, but he had an eye to back it up.

[00:43:27.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What do you think, besides those two qualities, were factors that made him so important as a dealer?

[00:43:35.15]

UNA JOHNSON: I think he—and I think this is true of the others, too—I think he really loved those things. He really—it was just a kind of a long, drawn-out love affair with this kind of—

[00:43:49.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it rubbed off on other people.

[00:43:51.41]

UNA JOHNSON: And you know, he was very instrumental in getting good collections going around. And he was very fussy about the people he sold things to, also. If he didn't think they were very—if they had a very good eye, if he didn't think so, he wasn't too interested.

[Laughs.] He was very difficult. [Laughs.]

[00:44:18.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's interesting, because he's one of the dealers that everybody talks about is, oh, wow, in the great days when he was dealing. But were there other helpful dealers besides those for the print department? Or were they—

[00:44:33.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, yes, there were. The people at Weyhe always were helpful. And they—Weyhe would reminisce about his artists because he supported a lot of—again, a German supporting artists. In the '20s and '30s, he had Maurer, and Hartley, and Lachaise, and you know, those people that no one really picked up. He had their drawings and prints, as well as their basic work.

[00:45:05.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Rockwell Kent for years.

[00:45:07.01]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] And Rockwell Kent.

[00:45:07.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even those.

[00:45:09.26]

UNA JOHNSON: Right. He still has a—tucked away, he still has a lot of good things.

[00:45:17.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: In fact, they just had a Rockwell Kent exhibition.

[00:45:20.41]

UNA JOHNSON: I know. He died. [Laughs.]

[00:45:22.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but those were drawings that Weyhe had bought in 1928.

[00:45:25.44]

UNA JOHNSON: I know.

[00:45:26.16]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They'd never been exhibited.

[00:45:29.19]

UNA JOHNSON: And then he supported the Emil Ganso, a great—one of the first—he was one of the first artists in residence.

[00:45:41.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:45:41.85]

UNA JOHNSON: At the University of Iowa, Before Lasansky. And Lasansky didn't really start the graphic arts section in Iowa. It was Emil Ganso.

[00:45:54.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? So that was built, taken over, and developed by—

[00:46:00.21]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Well, then Lasansky developed it into quite a different thing. But Ganso taught printmaking and painting.

[00:46:14.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I didn't know he started that department out there.

[00:46:17.82]

UNA JOHNSON: I think—well, I don't think he started it, but I think he was one of the main—the first ones. He was the first paid artist in residence, too. So that made a—you know, he was there for about three or four years, I believe.

[00:46:33.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:46:33.84]

UNA JOHNSON: I wouldn't be sure about that. But I think so.

[00:46:38.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about Mr. Hayter? Do you ever get involved with him and his school of activities?

[00:46:44.41]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, he had many, and he was a fascinating personality. Well, he did, I suppose, more to really shake up American prints than anybody did—got it out of a rut right away. And his point of view was the artist, rather than the printmaker. Although, he was terribly involved in print. He was interested, basically, in artists who happened to be printmakers, or did prints along with something else.

[00:47:15.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:47:15.61]

UNA JOHNSON: That was his point of view. And of course, he came in as basically interested in more of the surreal, the Surrealists.

[00:47:22.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they had been his friends in Europe.

[00:47:23.92]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, you see. And then he just took—brought along all those artists. And they were glad to have a meeting place. And it was a fascinating studio. It was full of ink. You didn't dare touch a thing. [They laugh.]

[00:47:41.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I think what you said about it being a meeting place is one of the most important aspects of—

[00:47:47.05]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes.

[00:47:47.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —of his studio.

[00:47:50.81]

UNA JOHNSON: He was a great one for discussions. And he was a stimulation for anyone who might have some ideas, and then, suddenly found he could express them. Hayter was very good at this, and was very tough about his point of view, and very concerned, a very difficult man. [Paul laughs.] But I think sometimes that it helps to have a difficult person, because often they're the ones that really have accomplished something.

[00:48:31.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, and he knew what you could do with almost anything.

[00:48:35.08]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, he did. And a very generous man, in a way, because he got all his students going. I know Lasansky didn't like him, finally, nor did Andre Roques, who's up at Columbia. But that was a—they were through with him, and then they were tired of him. But there are many who still are great supporters of Bill Hayter. There's Karl Schrag, and there's Peterdi. And he's often handled them badly.

[00:49:17.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true.

[00:49:18.46]

UNA JOHNSON: But you know, they just discount that.

[00:49:20.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You did this USIS post-war in 1960 show.

[00:49:33.31]

UNA JOHNSON: I don't remember. I did about six different things for the USIS.

[00:49:37.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, which one? They came to you to do these projects?

[00:49:43.10]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, I did. The first one I did was on American woodcuts, modern American woodcuts. And then I did one on the intaglio. And then I did one on combined techniques, which went to Italy and Southern Europe, more or less. I don't know. Then they always ended up everywhere else.

[00:50:08.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. They just wandered away.

[00:50:09.72]

UNA JOHNSON: I had a little trouble with them. I said—at first, you know, you couldn't select an artist if he were a Communist. This all because they were part of the U.S. government. And so I held out for that. I said, I can't—I don't know what they are, and I'm not going to find out. So I just won't do any shows. And so then they finally got their—they got permission. It had nothing to do with the people who were working within the program.

[00:50:49.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was political.

[00:50:50.36]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was a political thing, and they couldn't—that was that. They finally got it down just so that the shows went out were sure to be—the artists were to be citizens of the United States. So that I went along with. I thought, well, I can do that. I can understand that

point of view, because they're trying to show Americans—

[00:51:14.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:51:16.67]

UNA JOHNSON: —in various countries. I mean, their work in various countries. So then I did all those shows for them. I did—must have been about five or six shows. And I was kind of shocked. I went up there one day, and I said, "Well, we did that show once somewhere." And Lois Bingham pulled out a whole portfolio of catalogs that I'd done for him. I said, "Gee, I earned a lot of money there, didn't I?" [They laugh.]

[00:51:47.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did you get a lot of feedback from those exhibitions from around the world and all those things?

[00:51:52.30]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We certainly did. I got letters from everybody. I didn't make anything on it, natch. I barely made expenses, ever. But then, again, it was an interesting thing. And then on some of them, I got kind of patriotic. I thought I should do it. And then they would twist my arm, because they knew. [Paul laughs.] But I liked those people, who got to work with them, in Washington. They were marvelous.

[00:52:14.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

[00:52:16.42]

UNA JOHNSON: And very careful, and very thoughtful. But they had a rough time, too, getting things—programs through. I had all those catalogs in various languages. It's amazing.

[00:52:33.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:52:35.50]

UNA JOHNSON: A bunch like that, and different—maybe the same show, but each place then published a catalog.

[00:52:41.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Different languages. Yeah. I have a whole collection.

[00:52:42.57]

UNA JOHNSON: You have a whole clutch of them, too.

[00:52:46.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's extraordinary to see a catalog produced in Guatemala.

[00:52:50.31]

UNA JOHNSON: I know!

[00:52:50.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the next one produced in Nigeria, or something. [Laughs.] And what they look like. We had talked before about that Tenth National Print, or Two Decades of American Prints. Did you just decide to do that as a survey exhibition at that time?

[00:53:19.87]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, that was a ten-year span of the national show. And it seemed like a good time to sort of—

[00:53:30.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Review.

[00:53:30.58]

UNA JOHNSON: —review it. And I believe at that time, maybe that was the time we changed it to a biennial. I'm not just sure. But that turned out to be quite an interesting resume of the former—because it gave that great period of American printmaking.

[00:53:54.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:53:58.73]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think the artists found it valuable. So did the collectors. They came back and back—or just people who were interested in prints.

[00:54:06.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because it's a very famous catalog, still.

[00:54:08.57]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah.

[00:54:09.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody wants one.

[00:54:11.00]

UNA JOHNSON: And it's out of print, long out of print.

[00:54:14.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, you did some of those Ford Foundation monographs, didn't you? When they were doing those.

[00:54:19.44]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. That was the latest project that I had a grant for. And that was a \$50,000 grant. And it was to be about \$10,000 for each of the ten artists. And the Ford Foundation thought it should be living American artists, which we did do. The only trouble, some of the ones died before we got to them, like Stuart Davis, and some of the others. But I think that's a good series. It's still going on. Jo Miller is having trouble with Mr. Albers on the next-to-the-last one. And then she's got one to do on Louis Schanker, because his woodcuts were so influential in the early times, coming from just a colored illustration into a real built-up color woodcut. But when I retired from there, I just left the whole project. I was going—they asked me if I wouldn't do the last two. And I decided that that should go on in the department, not with me. I'd done the others. And we did get it down, trimmed down to nine, because the publishing expenses, of course, began—

[00:55:58.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Going up and up.

[00:55:59.32]

UNA JOHNSON: —rising. So we were just out of luck. And this was a modest publication, anyway. It was meant as a tool, not as a cocktail table book, you see?

[00:56:13.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what—we haven't talked about the staff, the people that worked with you in your department. Who are some of those people?

[00:56:23.70]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, we had—early, we had volunteers, and then—oh, I guess for the past eight, ten years, Jo Miller has been there. And she's taken over. She's excellent. And I took over from Schniewind.

[00:56:38.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. But you had volunteers for that long?

[00:56:41.58]

UNA JOHNSON: We had some volunteers, yes, some good ones. They still have volunteers, people who might have come there to that particular department. Jo Miller came from the Art Institute, because they used my book on printmaking, which wasn't a text for anybody professionally. It was just a text for techniques for people who were interested in printmaking. But they used it in the Art Institute as a sort of a little textbook, quick text.

[00:57:16.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[00:57:18.21]

UNA JOHNSON: And so when she came to New York, she was bound to go to work in this department. And the only job she could get was in the Director's office as one of his assistant secretaries. And she worked there for quite a while. And then when I got—the reason, basically, that I got a—wanted to get a grant, was that I needed an assistant, and the only way I could get it was to find a grant that would work so I could get an assistant to help do the grant itself. And then I'd have it. So she did double duty there.

[00:57:51.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, my.

[00:57:53.07]

UNA JOHNSON: But it was interesting. And the volunteers got very excited about it, too. They would be mostly college people, who would come in. And it was a very active kind of department. And there were artists coming in all the time. They like to see that, you know. It's always something different.

[00:58:14.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

[00:58:16.57]

UNA JOHNSON: So it was kind of fun, on top of the kind of the horrendous amount of work we did accomplish. But Jo's still doing the same thing, just as madly. [Laughs.]

[00:58:34.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That's interesting, that people really seem to stay at that museum, don't they? When they get there, they just stay and stay and stay.

[00:58:42.31]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, there were—well, I think Toby Rose is the one that's there the longest now. And she's just been made supervisor or something, of education, under this new regime. And she's been there for about 35 years.

[00:59:00.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

[00:59:00.28]

UNA JOHNSON: It was the first job she ever had out of Vassar.

[00:59:02.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

[00:59:04.03]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] I think that sounds pretty rough to me.

[00:59:08.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, wow.

[00:59:09.07]

UNA JOHNSON: But I'm not—well, I wasn't that far behind. [They laugh.]

[00:59:13.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous. Let's see. Okay. Well, we've talked about dealers and all kinds of things. But could we talk about your ideas about what a curator should do, and how you define the idea and activities of a curator?

[00:59:36.78]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, my idea of a curator is a little different, I guess, from a more—a curator who has an Old Master collection, for instance. But ours was a Contemporary collection. And I was interested in the artist. I was interested in what he thought, and why, maybe, he did some of the things he did in his work. And this was always my interest. For me, prints came alive because the artists were them, doing something. And you knew them. I knew literally hundreds of artists all through there.

[01:00:21.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

[01:00:22.51]

UNA JOHNSON: And I learned more from artists than I ever learned in any graduate course or school I ever went to. And I'm happy to say that. But some of them were just absolutely fascinating in the revelation that you could see in their work. And there was no funny business about it. You knew exactly what they—the theory was a working theory. It wasn't just a high spun theory, where the artist was Dürer, or Rembrandt, or somebody that, of course, you didn't know.

[01:00:57.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Two hundred years ago. [Una laughs.] Right, right.

[01:01:00.43]

UNA JOHNSON: But I think that's—I'm not so interested in just finding out what an artist did way back in a tremendously great history of prints. I'm interested in what the artist around you—

[01:01:25.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]—the fellow down the street is doing today.

[01:01:27.30]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes, today. That was the great thing with me.

[01:01:32.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you wanted to exhibit what was really current.

[01:01:35.27]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. I suppose mine was less of a scholarly thing than many curators. I was interested in the Old Masters, because some of them are just absolutely tremendously great. But it was the artist himself who got me always. And during the '50s, it was very exciting. They were all working really madly.

[01:02:04.70]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Could I interrupt? [Recorder stops, restarts.]

[01:02:06.12]

UNA JOHNSON: You think nothing of—[Recorder stops, restarts.]

[01:02:10.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what about the relationships with other museums, and things? You obviously lent prints.

[01:02:16.96]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

[01:02:17.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: All this kind of—

[01:02:18.70]

UNA JOHNSON: The print field is full of lending activity, because they are more available and easier to manage.

[01:02:30.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You roll them up and send them out.

[01:02:32.89]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, you can send them flat, or you can send them—and they don't weigh so much. I think anymore people hate to do that, and some museums are charging 25¢ a frame—\$25 a framed piece now.

[01:02:48.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

[01:02:48.67]

UNA JOHNSON: The Boston Museum is, and quite a number of museums are. The Museum of Modern Art is. The Whitney charges for anything over five pieces that you might borrow. I think it's merely that they're so broke in many instances, that they just—And I think it's a good thing that things are so expensive, because now we're seeing what some of the museums really have, instead of—they're making do with their own collection a little more.

[01:03:20.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're bringing it out from—Well, do you find that over the years that the activities you had as a curator shifted or changed a great deal? Or were there certain—the people changed a great deal, and the prints, but was there a similarity in activity, or did that change, too?

[01:03:44.20]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, not too much, except I think in the last—during the '60s, the difference came in the artists, simply because more painters were making prints. And it wasn't a—just a printmaking point of view.

[01:04:08.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, I see. So, that's—

[01:04:09.40]

UNA JOHNSON: It was more of an image, the idea of an image, rather than the idea of a technique. I think that was perhaps one of the greater changes. And of course, after Hayter came, that was a great thing, because we got rid of all that social stuff, you know—

[01:04:31.70]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[01:04:32.96]

UNA JOHNSON: —which got to be pretty horrendous, finally. There weren't very many good ones. I may be prejudiced, but it was kind of a fierce—that whole WPA thing, you know, the slant was kind of grim.

[01:04:46.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[01:04:46.94]

UNA JOHNSON: But there, too, there were some great artists working. But—so I think those—well, even the WPA, when you think about it, WPA changed a lot of things. Artists could experiment at least, instead of making potboilers forever. And then Hayter came along, and he changed a lot, and made the people in other media—the woodcut people changed. Everybody changed, because intaglio was—you know, that was his interest.

[01:05:24.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then lithography with Tamarind became—

[01:05:26.90]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And then lithography was sort of a slow sister, as it were, in the American—because that still went on, that sort of grainy, you know, crayon lithography that you could dye with, in spite of Goya, and all the rest of them. I mean, Americans just went right on with that stuff. But again, they didn't have the big workshops that were in Paris. And then Tamarind came along, and did change that whole method.

[01:06:07.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay. Well, that's about—

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[00:00:03.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Side two, and we can talk for a second about how the recent American artists might relate to history, in printmaking.

[00:00:18.61]

UNA JOHNSON: That's a tall order, isn't it? [They laugh.] Well, I do think that the artists in the '60s, for instance, changed the whole idea of prints.

[00:00:33.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Which particular people?

[00:00:34.74]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, all of those from Warhol on, who took the—just the sort of flotsam and jetsam cast-off images and made something of it—either something quite wry and kind of marvelous, or horribly pedestrian, which often, it was in the real—in real life. [Laughs.]

[00:01:04.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, in real life.

[00:01:06.08]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think that the—that's one of the tremendous changes. Not all artists do that. But I think this was the great force that was quite, quite different. And I don't know in any part of printmaking where that has occurred so radically. I think surely the Impressionists changed from the precise thing that preceded them—the Romantic stuff and the preciseness of that image. But never an absolute throwing out of an old image and bringing something extraneous in, whether it be a boot, or a face, or a flower, or whatever. The way it was handled in the commercial—almost like—it was almost a commercialization.

[00:02:00.22]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. It wasn't the valuable print on rare paper, and all of that mystique.

[00:02:08.24]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, I think it really was, though. They were doing that in a kind of a strange tongue-in-cheek way too, making it a precious thing which—and there it was, just an old cast-off ad, or something. [They laugh.]

[00:02:22.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but they—you know, their—Warhol has always had somebody else really produce his prints.

[00:02:27.86]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Well, that has come into—there's been another—a whole a second operation between the artist and his work. [Cross talk.] And I think that's where the painters then were interested to coming in—or were interested to come in. They didn't have to go into the mechanics of it. But—

[00:02:49.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Salvador Dalí has taken that to the n-th degree, I think, hasn't he? [Laughs.]

[00:02:54.64]

UNA JOHNSON: Just to the n-th degree.

[00:02:57.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you see the Allen Ritch exhibition of the "Memories of Surrealism?"

[00:03:02.20]

UNA JOHNSON: I didn't see that.

[00:03:03.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's fantastic. It had the collages on one wall and the prints on the other wall. And he swears up and down they're original prints.

[00:03:09.94]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, dear. Well, I'm glad I didn't see that. [Laughs.]

[00:03:14.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because they're smaller than the collage, and they're cheaper.

[00:03:17.43]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.] But I don't know what they're doing in the '70s. I mean, I don't know what will come out of that. There are a lot of people who are just working along, and not really showing their work so much.

[00:03:33.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

[00:03:34.63]

UNA JOHNSON: Well, the old-time printmakers, for instance. People like Lasansky, Peterdi, and that whole group that came up under the Hayter—the aegis of Hayter—the Hayter studio. They're working, but they're not exposed. They're not having that many exhibitions.

[00:03:56.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they don't feel the need, I think.

[00:03:57.40]

UNA JOHNSON: But they're selling, I think.

[00:03:58.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:03:58.78]

UNA JOHNSON: They don't need this anymore.

[00:04:00.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:04:01.00]

UNA JOHNSON: And they're not the last word. They're resigned to that, I think, and at this point, I suppose, couldn't really care less. But when it finally levels off after you get a—looking at it through the diminishing end of a telescope or something, then you wonder just how great the '60s really were.

[00:04:24.97]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I think it's interesting that somebody like de Kooning now in the last couple of years has really gotten involved with lithography.

[00:04:32.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:04:32.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And he's down there all this summer [inaudible]. He's making a new series. Yeah.

[00:04:36.46]

UNA JOHNSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's interesting.

[00:04:37.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it took a long time for him to come around to that.

[00:04:42.43]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And I think some of the sculptors, even. And that was seldom so. I mean, there were just few who did—

[00:04:55.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very few sculptors. Yeah.

[00:04:57.97]

UNA JOHNSON: And it seems strange, because you would think that a sculptor might be interested in the kind of three-dimensional relief print, you know?

[00:05:07.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:05:07.66]

UNA JOHNSON: I mean, it is a material that he's carving. It's seldom that, though. I mean, there's seldom interest. I think it's awfully hard to tell what the real perspective will be, and how much Tamarind, say, will have finally influenced lithography. I think Tamarind's influence is almost entirely technical.

[00:05:48.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it had a great influence on the market too, I think.

[00:05:51.31]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. Yes, the commercial market. And she certainly did—June Wayne certainly did push that around. And in a way, she was right. I think all that West Coast is pretty high in price. I think Tamarind is too high. I think Gemini is too high— \$1,800 for a Jasper Johns. I'd rather have a drawing.

[00:06:20.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. But the drawings are \$4,000 and \$5,000.

[00:06:24.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. The drawings are \$4,000 and \$5,000.

[00:06:25.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:06:27.68]

UNA JOHNSON: So there you are.

[00:06:28.49]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where do you go?

[00:06:29.45]

UNA JOHNSON: Do you want to put the light on, Emily, please?

[00:06:31.85]

EMILY: Yeah. You're sitting here in the dark. [They laugh.]

[00:06:36.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think that this whole print resurgence of the last few years is

going to continue or—with the print clubs and Collectors' Guild, its 100,000 members and all of this kind of—

[00:06:50.90]

UNA JOHNSON: I have a feeling that the dealers are going to sort of stop that, because they have put such prices on. And I sometimes wonder if, as a result, we are not getting some potboilers like we had in the '20s and the '30s, only it's in an idiom that's quite, quite different. And it's hard-edge, or geometric or whatever it is. And how many, I mean, are some of these potboilers? I look at some of them, and I think, you know—but that is a—that's the manipulation, again, of a market, as it was then.

[00:07:39.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Yeah. But also, it's kind of one of the hazards of prints, because you can just sit down—you know, it's like Picasso. I'm sure somebody said, "Why don't you draw on a stone instead of a piece of paper?" [They laugh.]

[00:07:53.02]

UNA JOHNSON: Yeah. Yeah. We could do that. [Laughs.]

[00:07:55.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [Inaudible.]

[00:07:56.32]

UNA JOHNSON: That was kind of intriguing. [They laugh.]

[00:08:00.10]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So—

[00:08:02.48]

UNA JOHNSON: I think it's going to take a while before we know.

[00:08:04.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:08:06.11]

UNA JOHNSON: I'd hate to predict it. [Laughs.]

[00:08:09.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But don't you think the fact that there are more people with such a great variety of ideas involved—doesn't that make it more interesting, do you think?

[00:08:19.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And I think that the general public is certainly a lot more aware of what is a work of art, or an original work of art, and what isn't. And they're no longer that interested in reproductions. I mean, you seldom go into a house anymore where you see framed reproductions. You don't see that very often, except if it's some special thing that somebody is very interested in, like the Leonardo "Saint Anne" or something—a drawing of the—

[00:08:49.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: A kind of classic image.

[00:08:50.91]

UNA JOHNSON: And so what? Anybody, I suppose, would like to have a reproduction. But—and I think young people are willing to have one really good modern print, and buy that, and

then get another one or something. Or they start out with prints, and then they go into more expensive things as they afford them.

[00:09:15.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Yeah.

[00:09:15.98]

UNA JOHNSON: But I do think that there are many more people who are interested in original works of art, whether it be a painting, sculpture, pots, or whatnot.

[00:09:25.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, it's closer to the source.

[00:09:29.36]

UNA JOHNSON: Yes. And as we get more and more mechanized, I suppose the hand thing is—it gets kind of precious. I hope it—we can get a few more hand things—handmade things.

[00:09:45.59]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:09:46.04]

UNA JOHNSON: Or using—manipulating the commercial thing into something that is more—that isn't just commercial.

[00:09:57.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, do you do you think that the museums affect an artist's market, or abilities in any particular way? If he has a big retrospective exhibition, there's his whole life laid out in front of the world.

[00:10:15.05]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, I think, again, it depends on who the artist is—if they know his name a bit.

[00:10:21.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because some artists have had tremendous reactions. Can't work, or they want to go away.

[00:10:27.62]

UNA JOHNSON: Oh, I—yeah. An exhibition—I've seen it happen—just finishes off an artist, and he can't work for weeks and months. And during the time—at least the time his diary is on public view—[laughs] he's fit to be tied, almost. And I would think that would be difficult. If I were an artist, I'd hate to face up to a retrospective. I remember when we had the Peterdi retrospective of just the prints some years ago at the Brooklyn Museum. He came out early. He said, "You and I just got to see this first." He says, "I just have to look at this before anybody else is around." [They laugh.] He was jittery about it. He was really jittery. After he'd seen it, then he was more relaxed about it.

[00:11:18.84]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It passed.

[00:11:19.25]

UNA JOHNSON: [Laughs.]

[00:11:20.25]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all right.

[00:11:21.48]

UNA JOHNSON: And I think Karl Schrag was kind of an—you know, very weary when his show was over, even at the at the Associated American Artists, because he never had a retrospective—and not of his prints, ever.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]